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THE CHILDREN'S YEAR.

LONDON:
SPOTTISWOODE and SHAW,
New-street-Square.

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THE TEA PARTY IN THE NURSERY.

THE

CHILDREN'S YEAR.

BY

MARY HOWITT.

WITH

FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN ABSOLON,

FROM ORIGINAL DESIGNS BY ANNA MARY HOWITT.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR

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PREFACE.

I HAVE often wished that in books for children the writer would endeavour to enter more fully into the feelings and reasonings of the child; that he would look at things as it were from the child's point of view rather than from his own. There are very few children's books written with this purpose kept in view; but my own knowledge of children, founded upon the every-day experience of many years, convinced me that to write successfully for them we must come down in some measure to their level. I resolved therefore to try the experiment of keeping for one whole year an exact chronicle, as it were, of the voluntary occupations and pleasures, and of the sentiments and feelings, as far as I could gain accurate knowledge of them, of my two youngest children. This little book is the result; every thing which it contains is strictly true.

If some things are childish, let it be remembered that it is of simple, artless childhood that I have

written. Had the little chronicle been kept during the present year instead of two years ago, the same character and the same individuality of temperament would be preserved, though somewhat more advanced, and in some cases more strongly developed.

Last year I received, from month to month, precisely the same kind of chronicle from my sister in America of the life and experience of her three children. The record is similar in spirit, but different in character, inasmuch as the life of healthy, happy children on the banks of the Ohio must of necessity be full of a fresher, more physically active, and less sophisticated life than with us.

In a short time I hope to have this work also ready as a companion volume to the present.

MARY HOWITT.

The Elms, Clapton.
Oct. 13. 1847.

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THE CHILDREN'S YEAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN'S HOME.

The children were Herbert and Margaret, or Meggy as she was called at home. They were very happy little children; they had kind parents, a pleasant home, a kind brother and sister older than themselves, good health and loving hearts, so that it would have been strange if they had not been happy.

We are going to tell other little children some of the things that they did, and some of the pleasures which they enjoyed for one whole year. All little children who read this book may be quite sure that every thing in it is true; they will see what Herbert and Meggy thought and did for one whole year, and very likely they will find that they have thought and done the very same things themselves.

Herbert and Meggy lived in the outskirts of London. Their house stood on a high road, from

which it was separated by a little green paddock and a row of tall old elm trees. Carts and omnibuses were always passing along the road, and gentlemen and ladies riding past on horseback, or driving in gay carriages. It was very amusing to sit at the windows on this side of the house to see all that was passing on the road, though it must be confessed that the leafy branches of the elm-trees made the view much less distinct in summer than in winter. The little paddock, however, was visible both in winter and summer, and it always looked green and pleasant. It was enclosed by neat white palings, and sheep now and then were turned into it to graze, which made it look still more country-like; but that which interested the children still more than the sheep, who might be said to be only occasional lodgers there, was the old couple who lived there every day, and these were a goose and a gander. Those two creatures belonged to a good, old poulterer who lived on the opposite side of the road. Every morning, when Herbert and Meggy were getting up, if they looked out of the window they could see the old goose and gander either waiting to set off, or on their way to this little paddock. They had to cross the busy high road to reach it, and it was quite amusing to see how deliberate and careful they were in all their movements. They would stand side by side on the

causeway like a cautious old couple, looking up the road and down the road, to see if all were safe, and if it appeared to them to be so, they would look at each other and nod their heads, and then step down from the raised curb-stone and into the road, and go waddling across, side by side; but evidently in a great bustle, lest any thing should come driving along unexpectedly. As soon as they had safely landed on the other side, they would pause as if to take breath, and one would look at the other, as if to say, "Let us be thankful that we have got safely over." And then they would very leisurely, and with great apparent self-satisfaction, turn in at the little white gate of the paddock, which always stood open for them, and begin nibbling the nice fresh grass with as much relish and delight as Herbert and Meggy would, half an hour afterwards, eat their own breakfasts. Herbert and Meggy often wondered how old this goose and gander were: they thought that they must be very old, because they looked so grave and experienced, and seemed to have lived so many years at the poulterer's across the way.

This side of Herbert's and Meggy's house which we have described was the front: at the back it was all as green and quiet as in a country village. There was a pleasant garden, in which grew plenty

of evergreens; there was a deal of smoothly mown grass in it, on which were many flower borders; there was a greenhouse, on the glass roof of which was trained a beautiful vine that bore plenty of grapes; there were green seats here and there in the garden where people sat in summer. According to Herbert and Meggy's opinion it was the most charming garden that ever was seen.

At the bottom of the garden there was a piece of ground which was laid out in three little gardens side by side. These belonged to Herbert and Meggy, and their elder brother. Their elder brother had made an arbour in his garden: he had made it all himself, and the little children thought it a beautiful place. On one side of his arbour grew a willow-tree, on the other a rose: sweet peas in summer were planted round it; and a large kind of water-melon was trained at its back, which with its large, luxuriant foliage, bright yellow flowers, and ponderous fruit, they thought very grand. Beyond the garden there extended pleasant open meadows for many miles. It was quite a country prospect. There were green meadows in which herds of cattle were feeding; a river wound along with a serpentine course; a railway showed itself in the distance, by the occasional prolonged snow-white beautiful torrent of steam, and beyond all lay a richly-wooded region.

A pleasant little lane not far off led down to these charming meadows; and when in these meadows the children had the delight of seeing, even to a considerable distance, their own home, with its tall old elm-trees and ivied front.

CHAP. II.

THE EIGHTH OF JANUARY, AND SOMETHING ABOUT THE CHILDREN.

On the 8th of January this little book was first begun. Herbert, on that day, was seven years old. Meggy was nearly a year and a half younger than he. They were not remarkably clever children; they were not geniuses in any way; but, as our young readers proceed with the book, they will find out all about them, and in many respects they will find that they greatly resemble themselves.

Herbert, at this time, in this very January of 1845, was a very happy little boy, because he was earnestly trying to cure himself of an awkward habit. We need not tell what it was: many little boys and girls have awkward habits, and we hope that they will set to in as good earnest as Herbert did to break themselves of them.

Everybody was glad that Herbert determined to correct his own failings, for, though he was naturally of a very ingenuous and noble disposition, he disliked exceedingly to be told of them: it made him feel angry and resentful, and this it was which made it so very desirable that he should correct himself.

It made him very happy when his mamma told him, on his birthday, that she thought he had almost cured himself of that awkward trick which annoyed every one.

That encouragement strengthened him to try still more.

"Then I think I shall conquer," said Herbert, triumphantly, and with a very happy feeling of self-approval; "and I will try to conquer all my faults, and to conquer myself of being angry when any one tells me of them, for I know it is wrong, and it always makes me very unhappy afterwards."

His mother kissed him and told him that, by cultivating this disposition, he would make all very easy to himself; and that the only way to prevent his being told of his faults, was to have no faults to be told of.

Herbert understood that perfectly, though he was but seven years old; and he felt at that moment as if it would be easy for everybody to have no faults and failings if they would only try.

Meggy, as we have said, was between five and six. She was a very quiet little girl, and had a large family of dolls, every one of which had its own individual name. A considerable part of each day was spent by Meggy in the nursery with a very good young woman, whose name was Ellen. Meggy loved Ellen very much indeed; she had

lived in the family ever since Meggy was a few months old.

Meggy, too, had a little fault as well as Herbert, and that was, that she was fond of being admired; and thus, if she were playing with her dolls, or had made a flower garden on the hearth-rug, or had dressed herself for the queen, she always wanted somebody to see her. She was often disappointed when she was with her mamma or her eldest sister, because they seemed to find their books or their work more interesting than she was.

Meggy was very fond of books, and, though she could not read well, she spelled out little words to herself, and would sit on the hearth-rug labouring over a little sentence till she found out the meaning of it. She was very quick and intelligent, and knew many little poems by heart, which she had great pleasure in repeating to herself and her dolls, though the pleasure was much increased when any grown person, or even Herbert, heard them also.

Spite of the little seed of vanity which had shot up in Meggy's heart, she was a good child. In her small way she wished very much to do right; she folded up her own clothes, and could be trusted to do little errands for herself or other people. She knew the places of her favourite books on the shelves, and carefully put them back again when

she had been using them. She was very kind-hearted too, and loved and fed the cat, which was considered her own property; and she was very sorry when her brothers caught birds in traps, and then killed them. She would warm them in her bosom, and try to bring them to life again. She was very soon affected by any sorrowful story, and because her mamma feared that this sensibility might weaken her character, she did not often read to her the "Babes in the Wood," or any sorrowful story which would make her cry, but, on the contrary, she liked her to hear pleasant tales, and natural history of all kinds, and to play with Herbert, who was a brave, stout-hearted boy, and to run about in the garden, and to get very strong in body.

Meggy enjoyed playing with Herbert: they never remembered the time when they were not each other's playfellows. They were very indulgent to each other, and having lived all their lives together, they understood each other's disposition so well that they very rarely disagreed. Herbert had a name for Meggy which nobody but himself used, and which he only used towards her when his heart was full of love or pity. He then called her Hexey. He called her so ever since they lived in Germany: nobody knew why he did so, and perhaps he himself did not. *Hexe*, in German, is a witch: this was

the name he gave her; but after they returned to England he called it Hexey, or Hexey-dear — and no one who had not heard him could imagine the deep tone of love in which he addressed her by that favourite name.

CHAP. III.

WINTER EVENINGS.

HERBERT'S and Meggy's father liked to have his children with him in an evening. They were delighted to come down to him when all his writing was done, and his books and papers put away, and he had nothing to do but to talk or to read to them.

Herbert could remember the time when he used to sit upon his papa's knee; now he was too heavy for that. Meggy sat on his knee now, and he either sat beside him on his low seat, or else leaned against his chair. Their papa would very often tell them stories of the time when he was a boy, and lived in the country, where there were plenty of cows and horses, and sheep, and pigs, and poultry, and when he kept rabbits and guinea-pigs of his own, or if he were not in a humour to tell a story, he would read to them some pleasant book or other. In this way a great many charming books had been read. At the beginning of the winter he had read to them Captain Marryat's "Settlers in Canada," and just at the time we are now writing of, he read them "Masterman Ready." There was a deal of talk while they were reading the "Settlers," about "suppose" they themselves

should go and live in America. Alfred, the children's elder brother, who sat by, and listened to all that was read, thought nothing in this world would be pleasanter than to go and live in America, and to have all kinds of difficulties and hard work to do, and to be in danger from Indians. To them this seemed very pleasant; and their papa indulged them by imagining all kind of adventures for them, and by telling, over and over again, the delightful story of "James Cheshire and Joel Churchill," two settlers among the squatters of the far west.

But now they were reading "Masterman Ready," and this, just at this time, was the favourite book. They thought Master Tommy, with all his gluttony and his laughable mishaps, very funny, while Ready and Master William were the objects of their great admiration. Herbert was very angry with Master Tommy for his laziness about fetching the water, which so unfortunately caused poor Ready's death. The children, both of them, cried sadly because Ready died. That was a very sorrowful evening on which they read of his death; and her mamma thought it almost a pity that Meggy had heard it, because it distressed her so much.

There was another book which was a great favourite at this time, and that was "Pilgrim's

Progress." It was as good as a fairy tale: Giant Despair was as pleasantly dismal as old Blue Beard himself, and Great-heart was a perfect hero. Their mamma told them, as they went on, what all this meant, and perhaps, at the time they understood something of the moral, but, to their minds, the book needed no explanation.

Alfred had a book also, which had been a great favourite with him when he was younger. This was the "Swiss Family Robinson." He read this book to Herbert, and talked about it to Meggy, and it and its people thus became their delight also. One day when Alfred saw the pleasure the two little ones had in the book, an idea occurred to him — a very pleasant and kind idea. And on this he set to work. He took a board about a foot broad, and eighteen inches long, and, having bored several holes in it with a gimlet, he stuck into the holes little branches, of various sizes, of juniper and arbor-vitæ, which looked exactly like trees. He then made a nice little house of paper, as much like that described in the "Swiss Family" as he could, and this he put into the largest tree, just as is described in the book, and cut out a neat little ladder of card-board, by which to go up into it. He then cut out the whole Robinson family, father and mother, and all the children, together with all the animals they were possessed of, and which he copied

very accurately, from Bewick's "Natural History." He put birds into the trees, and cut out neat little tables and chairs for the house, within which sat Mrs. Robinson, while her husband and sons were all busy below, some driving up the cattle, one milking, and another with a gun in his hand, aiming up into a tree.

It occupied Alfred many evenings to complete all this, and the doing of it was a great pleasure to himself, and as to the two little children, nothing could equal their delight in it. They thought it so kind of Alfred; they loved him so much for doing it; and besides this they could feel as if they themselves were one of the little pasteboard Master Robinsons, who were so busy in that pleasant island: they felt while they made their little figures mount up the ladder, as if they themselves were doing so, and then as if they went into the little house in the tree, and sat down with good Mrs. Robinson.

Every evening, for a long time, it was brought out. The little Robinson family were kept in a table drawer, and the island, with all its beautiful trees, in a closet, and thus every evening it was set out afresh, and the variety which they could produce by a new arrangement made it always a fresh pleasure.

CHAP. IV.

A HUMBLE TEA PARTY.

THE servants who lived with Herbert's and Meggy's parents were very good, respectable women. The children went but rarely into the kitchen, yet now and then they did so — for instance, one evening soon after New Year's Day. In the morning the children came running to their mother with a note in their hands. It was an invitation from the cook and the housemaid for them to drink tea in the kitchen. Such a thing was to them delightful: they had never had tea in the kitchen in their lives. Might they do so? Would their mamma give them leave? Their mamma, whose consent had been first asked, gave them leave; they therefore ran into the nursery to beg Ellen to write them an answer, which was sealed and sent down stairs.

In the evening they had their best clothes put on, and went down into the kitchen to tea. The servants had their Sunday gowns and caps on, and clean white aprons, and the whole kitchen looked very bright and company-like. There was a hearth-rug before the great kitchen fender, and a nice red cloth on the little kitchen table, on which the tea

things were already set out. A large fire blazed so brightly in the grate that the candles seemed to burn quite dim. The dish covers and the brass pans shone out on the walls; so did the blue and white dinner service which was ranged on the dresser shelves. The children looked round, and thought how pleasant the kitchen was. There were sprigs of green holly and ivy, and bunches of red holly berries stuck all about in the brass candlesticks which were not used, and among the dishes and plates and bright tin covers; it looked quite splendid! And then there was a low, warm sound of water bubbling in the boiler by the fire, and a chirping of crickets on the hearth, and such a warmth and glow as was quite delicious. The children laughed and were very merry, and the two servants laughed and were very merry too. There were two arm chairs with cushions in them for the children to sit in, one on each side the fire; and here they sat and talked and watched the toasting of a tea cake, and then they all sat down to tea as merry as could be. Both Herbert and Meggy thought that never in all their life had they had such delicious tea as this which the servants had prepared for them. And then, after tea, they all sat round the fire and guessed riddles; and then the servants told them about the time when they

were little girls, and about their homes and their playfellows, which both Herbert and Meggy thought very interesting indeed.

In the course of the evening Alfred presented himself at the kitchen door with an accordion in his hand, and asked permission to come in and play them a tune. He played very merrily, so merrily indeed that they could not help dancing; so Herbert waltzed with the cook, and Meggy with the housemaid, and then they two danced what they called the Polka together, much to the amusement of their entertainers. When they were tired of dancing, Alfred sang them a song, and then it was supper time, and he was asked to join them, which he had no objection to do, because he saw oranges and gingerbread, which the cook had just set on the table. The supper was merrier than the tea had been; Alfred was very funny, and sang them another song; and they guessed riddles, and told merry stories, and laughed so loud that any body might have heard them all the way upstairs. By this time it was nine o'clock, and their parents, who had been out, came home, and they had just time to tell them what a deal of fun they had had, before they went to bed.

CHAP. V.

ABOUT ABIJAH BUCKET.

HERBERT and Meggy, like all other children, liked to imagine things in their play. It happened that Ellen had some Quaker relations, and now and then she used to go to the Friends' meeting, and once when she went, she took the two children with her. Herbert did not wish to go a second time. He said it tired him so to sit still, and he could not help falling asleep, which was not quite right in a place of worship, so he said he should never go again. Meggy, on the contrary, said she liked it. She never therefore objected to go; and as she could manage to keep awake, and as she sat very still, and looked very mild and gentle, the kind-hearted Friends took a deal of notice of her, and invited her to go and see them. One day she went with Ellen to see a Quaker lady, who had a beautiful aviary; there were in it five-and-twenty canary birds, and piping bullfinches and doves, and beautiful trees and flowers, among which the birds flew, and it was therefore very charming.

Herbert, though he did not again wish to go to the meeting, was very willing to play at going to see the Friends; and, according to their account,

nothing could equal the kindness of the old Quaker ladies and gentlemen.

One day they went out a walk with Ellen, and to amuse themselves by the way, they pretended that they met with an old Quaker gentleman whom they called Bucket; but as they said he would not wish them to call him *Mr.*, they spoke of him as Friend Bucket, or Abijah Bucket. They never had heard of or seen a person of that name, and it was all a little piece of acting and self-deception, and it amused them very much. When they came home, they could talk about nothing but "Friend Bucket and his great politeness to them, and how he had invited them to go and see him; and they certainly should!" They laughed very much, and were very merry about this good-natured old gentleman.

Their mamma knew that it was all a joke, and so did they themselves; but so completely had the idea taken possession of their fancies, that for a long time he was a hero in all their play. Now, they pretended that his house was in one corner of the nursery; now, in a large closet on the staircase, and now at the end of the garden. According to their account, he often changed his residence; but let him live wherever he would, he was so kind and good-natured that he was always glad to see them.

They always laughed very much, and looked a

little ashamed when grown-up people asked after Mr. Bucket, but they were very much in earnest when they were by themselves.

At this time their elder sister was paying a long visit in the country, and in taking leave of the children she had said, "I may perhaps see your friend Mr. Bucket in Nottinghamshire, if I do I will tell him to write to you."

"Yes, do!" said both the little ones, and laughed merrily.

One day a letter came by post, addressed to the children. Nothing could equal their delight at having a letter by post. The handwriting was very large, and very plain to read, and the letter was as follows: —

"My dear young Friends,

"It is with great satisfaction that I now write to you. Your dear sister Mary is here and is well, and sends her love to you. She has a deal to say about you, and I have made many inquiries respecting you and yours. Of course I asked after your old rabbit, called Widow Brown, and after the guinea pigs. I also asked whether your worthy German friend Petz Nickel, or Nicholas-in-furs, had paid you a visit, and whether his rod was as large in England as in Germany: she tells me it is much larger.

"Your sister wishes me to relate to you a curious circumstance, which perhaps may turn out a ghost story.

"One wild snowy night last week when the wind was howling dismally all round the house, and moaning down the chimneys and about the frozen tops of the leafless trees, I went up to my bed rather earlier than common, because my rheumatism plagued me. As I went up stairs I looked from the window on the staircase, and saw how the window ledges were filled up with snow, and the snow falling all the time. I thought that we should have to be dug out of the house next morning if the snow continued. The wind blew as I told you dismally, and rattled the loose casements, and roared down the chimneys; and just as I opened my door out went my candle, from a great gust which seemed to come out of my own comfortable chamber. The dark bed curtains, which were drawn, hid the fire-place from sight; in which, indeed, hardly a spark of fire could be seen, and therefore I was in darkness. Just at that very moment what should I hear but a dull, bellowing sound, just like the roaring of a bull; and up stairs rushed my old faithful servant Matthew, and Keziah and Rebecca after him as white as ashes, frightened out of their wits, and begging I would please to go down and

just see what dreadful sort of thing had got into the house.

"There was a condition for me to be in, with my rheumatism and three cowardly servants, and a horrid monster in the house and no near neighbours, and the alarm-bell broken! and all this time the thing roaring frightfully.

"If you want to hear more, you must let me know.

"Write for me under cover to your sister, and give my love to your parents.

"Your true old friend,

"ABIJAH BUCKET."

Their mother read them the letter; it caused at first a great excitement. Meggy, however, from the first, was very grave; after awhile she suddenly exclaimed, as if now determined to speak her mind plainly,—

"It is not Friend Bucket who has written the letter! There is no Friend Bucket. It is Mary who has written it herself. There cannot be a Friend Bucket in reality, because it was all our own making up for fun. Was it not, Herbert?"

Meggy was very earnest, and her mother saw plainly the operation of her mind. She had very much enjoyed playing at old Mr. Bucket; both

she and Herbert knew that it was all only make-believe, and, that though they pretended he was a real person who talked to them, yet he never did because he was not real. And now her sister was trying to impose upon them; and some way or other her sense of right and wrong was displeased. She could not enter into the fun of the correspondence; she was evidently grieved and surprised, and rather offended that any grown-up people should, as it were, lend themselves to a deception. She heard the letter to the end, was quite excited about the strange noises, but would hear nothing about Mr. Bucket.

"You must write to good Mr. Bucket," said her mamma, "and ask what the dreadful noise was, at all events."

Meggy hopped round upon her little toes, as if it were a matter of perfect indifference to her, and said,

"There is no Mr. Bucket, and so I don't believe there was any noise."

"Yes, write this very minute," exclaimed Herbert, "I am sure there was a noise, and I think it was either rats or owls!"

"Then *you* believe in Mr. Bucket, though Meggy does not," said their mother.

Herbert laughed and blushed a little and looked

at Meggy; who stood steadfastly, and again asserted that there was no Mr. Bucket.

Herbert was not inclined to have any controversy, so he ran away; but the next evening he came to his mamma, and looking rather crimson said, in an under tone, as if he were a little ashamed of his request, "Will you write a letter for me to Friend Bucket, and I will tell you what to say."

"Yes, surely, I will write for you, if you wish it," said his mamma.

The next day, therefore, they sat down to write an answer.

"What am I to say?" asked the mother.

"Say that I know there is no Mr. Bucket," said Meggy, who stood near the fire.

Herbert said, "Very well, that might be written as coming from Meggy, but for his part he had no intention of dropping Friend Bucket though she might, and therefore she must not interfere, nor put in any more of her sentences."

The mother said, "That she thought Meggy was quite right in expressing her opinion; and Meggy's remark being now written down, Herbert should dictate the remainder of the letter."

He therefore dictated a very respectful reply to the old gentleman, requesting further information on the interesting subject contained in his letter.

Herbert knew as well as Meggy did, that there really was no Abijah Bucket, and that the letter really came from his sister Mary, who intended to please them by writing it; but unlike Meggy, he was convinced that the strange and dismal noise was no make-believe, and *that* he wanted to have cleared up.

A post or two afterwards brought him the following letter in reply:—

"My dear young Friend,

"I am sorry that thy sister Meggy has dropped my acquaintance, as at one time I knew she liked me very much, and I suppose now she will not take a walk with me or come to visit me. But, however, I send my love to her, and some day when I get down into your neighbourhood again, I shall send her some of my nice gingerbread.

"And I must now tell thee all about the horrid noise. Let me see, where did I leave off?—I remember. I and my poor servants stood all together by my bed-room door, and the noise was still as loud as ever, now ceasing, or dying away for a moment, and then beginning again with all its might; and what was worst of all, my old dog Carlo seemed as much excited as we were, and barked furiously.

"'It can't be any thing supernatural,' said Keziah, 'else the dog would not brave it in that

way!' So bidding Matthew come on, and not frighten the old master with that timorous face of his, she said she would go down stairs again and hunt it out.

"Matthew, however, preferred helping me down stairs again, as he said my rheumatism made my joints stiff; so we all went down together, and the lower we went the louder was the noise.

"All at once Keziah had recovered her courage, and taking the dog with her went on boldly. It was somewhere, either in the library or the dining-room; first it seemed in one, and then in the other. We all stood in the library, where I had been sitting all day, and listened. It seemed to come out of a large closet in the room; and there sure enough the monster, let it be what it would, had housed itself. This closet, my dear young friend must understand, had formerly been a passage from this room into the dining-room, so that there was a door at either end; but the one which led into the dining-room had been closed many years, and a large heavy piece of furniture stood before it in the dining-room, so as to conceal it from sight. The closet itself was full of chests, in which I have kept letters and papers for many years, and nobody but myself was in the habit of going into it.

"This closet door now stood ajar, and the moment we entered the room the roaring began. It was

exactly like a wild beast, only I knew there could be no wild beast; and I then considered what else it was like, — it was like wind roaring through a pipe, and was really very wild and dismal. The effect of the noise on the dog was very strange, the moment it began he began to whine mournfully, and then break out into a barking.

"I was puzzled to make out what it could be, but ordering Matthew and Keziah to enter with me we began to shove about the chests, and we set many an ancient black spider scampering about in an alarm greater than our own. For some time all was still, and then we heard the wind howling down the chimney and round the house, and the next moment the noise began. It was from the closet-door. Along the crevice where the door closed, my young friend must understand, that there had been strong brown paper pasted; we examined it, and now saw that it was broken, as if by the forcible opening of the door. The mystery was now all explained. I had had an old acquaintance to dine with me that day who had never been at the house for some years, never since the passage had been turned into the closet. In going to the dining-room he went, as he had done formerly, into the closet, and attempting to open the door at the end found out his mistake. We had laughed heartily about it at the

time; but never expected to have had a serious fright in consequence.

"This, my dear little friend, is all I have to tell, and I hope thou understandest clearly how it was; my visiter had partly opened the door and broken the paper, just sufficiently to admit a strong current of air, which on the opening of the library door produced a dismal roaring sound.

"The ghost being thus 'laid,' as one may say, the doors were all closed; the dog became quiet and slept, and so did we all. The wind, which had been the cause of all the disturbance, abated a little past midnight; and the next morning a bright, clear sun shone over all the snow-covered landscape, and the bells of the village church rang merrily, for a very pretty and good girl was married that morning. My rheumatism too was a great deal better, so I ordered my old chaise to be brought to the door, and Matthew drove me down to call on thy sister. She sends her love to thee and to dear little Meggy.

"Give my love to thy parents,

"And believe me, thy true friend,

"ABIJAH BUCKET."

Another letter came from Abijah to Herbert, containing three little papers, on each of which a little bird was very accurately and beautifully

pricked with a pin, and if they were held up against the light they looked as if they were made of fine lace. The letter said that they came as a present to Herbert from Abijah Bucket's grandchildren.

Their mamma thought Meggy would be delighted with them because they were so delicate, but strange to say, as coming from the impostor Abijah Bucket, Meggy would have nothing to do with them. It seemed as if she thought there was some trick about them.

Herbert put them in the table-drawer with the paper animals and persons belonging to the Swiss Family Robinson, and used to look at them frequently with great pleasure.

Her mamma observed that Meggy never took any notice of them; and if at any time she saw them lying about she did not even put them by, which was unlike her usually neat habits.

The children's mother saw a great difference in their characters from this little incident of the imaginary Mr. Bucket; and as they had now entirely ceased to play at him, she proposed to Herbert to give up all pretence about him.

"Oh no!" said Herbert, "I shall not!" and as usual laughed.

"And why not? You know that those letters were only from Mary."

"No," said Herbert, "I shall have Mr. Bucket

still; I am very fond of him, and he writes such nice letters!"

Herbert chose to be deceived, so his mamma said no more to him on the subject.

He took out the little pricked birds, and pointed out their beauties to Meggy — "See," said he, "how pretty they are! Are not friend Bucket's grandchildren very clever?"

"Yes, they are pretty enough!" said Meggy, hardly condescending to look at them; "but it is all silly pretence about Friend Bucket and his grandchildren."

CHAP. VI.

ALFRED'S ADVENTURES ON THE ICE.

In February there was a great deal of cold weather. Winter seemed to have come back again; the snow fell, and there was such severe frost that the ponds in the neighbourhood of the children's home were again covered with ice. Alfred again brought out his skates, which he had just put by, as he thought, for the season, and went out, whenever he could get the time, to enjoy his favourite amusement of skating.

One of the greatest pleasures which Herbert now had was going out with Alfred on such excursions. It was very delightful to him, for then Alfred was always in such a good humour, and with his skates in one hand and Herbert's hand in the other, away they went laughing and chattering as merry as could be.

At the beginning of the winter it had not been half as pleasant to Herbert. Alfred used at that time to be always going with some young lady friends of his, whom he pushed along the ice in a chair, whilst he skated, as he had seen done in Germany, when, a year or two before, the whole family had been there. Alfred and the young

ladies used to be so much occupied with each other that poor Herbert always found it very dull, and as, besides this, he was then rather timid in going on the ice, it never afforded him much pleasure. But now things were quite changed. The young ladies did not care about being pushed by Alfred in the chair, and seldom came out, so that Alfred had nothing better to do than to make a companion of little Herbert. And so great was Herbert's admiration of his elder brother, and his love for him, that nothing made him happier, nor put him in such good humour with himself, as for Alfred to make him his companion. Herbert, too, had by this time lost his fear of the ice: he ventured boldly upon it, when his brother had once assured him that it would bear, and thus he would run about on it and practise sliding and keep himself quite warm, let it be as cold as it would. Alfred and his young gentlemen acquaintance, too, on the ice, used to set him to clear away all the sticks and stones out of their way, and thus he found he could be very useful, which is always a pleasant thing, and which was so particularly now to Herbert, for Alfred used to call him his man Friday, and that pleased him very much. Alfred told Herbert that in a year or two he would teach him to skate, and would give him the skates which he was then wearing, and which by that time would be too

small for him. In his mind Herbert almost thought that that time was now come: he made a little run, slided along on his feet, and fancied that he was skimming over the ice on a pair of skates like his brother and the other tall youths who seemed to him such very manly and clever fellows.

Every night it froze very sharply; in the morning the chamber window panes were covered with beautiful branching and feathery frost-work, and the water tubs in the yard were all one solid mass of ice; but for all that in the day the sun shone very warm, and thawed the paths and even the surface of the ice. Alfred's mamma began to fear that it was not safe to skate any longer, because there were cracks in the ice here and there, and as the skaters went over it, it bent like a bow. Alfred was very unwilling to give up skating, and Herbert was just as unwilling to give up the pleasure of going out with him.

"Let me just go once more," asked Alfred, "only just to try if it will bear on the nearest pond."

His mamma reluctantly consented. He was just to go and try whilst Herbert and little Meggy had their things put on, for Meggy was to go out with them that day. Alfred promised that unless other skaters were on the ice he would not venture, and at all events Meggy and Herbert were not to

go on it, but were to take Ellen with them to bear them company while they walked about near the pond. The children and Ellen were just dressed and ready to go down stairs, when Alfred's voice was heard below, talking eagerly and laughing very much. The next moment they heard him coming up stairs, but very slowly and heavily, and then they saw him, and at every step the water was running from him like a river.

"I have been in," said Alfred, "in, up to my neck! only look how wet I am, and it feels so queer, and sticky, and so heavy!" and then he laughed again as if it were a very funny thing indeed.

But Alfred's mamma did not think it funny at all, and at first she was sorry that she had consented for him to go; in a little while, however, she thought it was best that he had gone, as perhaps this little accident might make him careful for the future.

It was a very amusing thing to Herbert to help Alfred to get his wet things off, for it was just like skinning some great creature, because his clothes stuck to him like a skin, and all the time Alfred was making it as funny as he could, because he did not wish any body to consider it a serious affair.

Alfred told how kind and alert every body had

been to him on the ice, and how impossible it would have been for him to have been drowned; he said that even the poor boys who were sliding there, when they saw him in, came running to the place to help him, and when he was out one unbuckled his skates, and another wrung out his gloves. Alfred's mamma and every body was glad to hear of this, and they wished they could tell the poor boys how much they were obliged to them. Herbert thought that he should very much like to give them something; and he and Alfred determined that when he was re-dressed in warm dry things, they would all set off to the pond, and if the boys were there, would thank them again.

Alfred took one of the little ones by each hand, and off they all three set towards the pond, so full of the adventure that they could talk about nothing else all the way. When they came to the pond, and saw the hole in the cracked and splintered ice into which Alfred had fallen, he became more and more of a hero in the two little children's minds.

Nobody was skating now: the ice was considered dangerous by all; even the boys who had been sliding were gone. The whole pond was deserted excepting by a group of ragged-looking lads who were throwing stones on the ice to break it. Meggy thought that they must be rude boys because they threw stones, and she could not conceive that any

of them had been kind enough to help her brother. Great, therefore, was her surprise, when in reply to Herbert's question whether any of those boys were they who had helped him, Alfred replied, "Yes, that lanky lad with the old hat, who is just now throwing a stone, he ventured upon the very rottenest ice to pull me out."

Herbert felt as if he could have hugged the lad, spite of his dirty clothes, and he pulled Alfred forward without saying a word. Meggy, too, was silent; she was thinking that people might be very good and yet poor and ragged.

When the boys saw Alfred coming they all looked at him with attention, for the ragged boy in the old hat had told them that the ice had broken in with him.

"I say, my good fellow," said Alfred, addressing the boy, "you were very brave in venturing on that rotten ice to pull me out; I did not thank you enough then, and I am come now to do so, and to thank the others also who helped me, but I see that they are gone."

"You're heartily welcome, sir, to what I did — and it was but little," said the boy, colouring till his poor, shabby face looked almost handsome.

The children walked on with Alfred, all wishing that they could have done something really to benefit the poor boy, could have given him some-

thing that would have lasted longer than their thanks.

The boy looked after them as they went on, and thought, for the first time, perhaps, that he had performed a good action, and to his feelings he was abundantly rewarded by Alfred's thanks, and by the kind and grateful expression of the little children's faces.

CHAP. VII.

ABOUT MARY COMING HOME.

At the end of February a great pleasure occurred at Herbert's and Meggy's home. Their dear elder sister, who had been away from home for three months, was now to return. Her arrival was talked of for a long time before it took place.

It gave Meggy great delight to see the fire lighted in her sister Mary's bed-chamber; she went and sat in that room, which was such a pleasant change from the nursery. To be sure its windows looked into the garden like the nursery, but there the garden did not look just the same, and altogether it was a change. Most people like a change and variety, and it is natural. Meggy was very natural in this respect, for she loved variety. She watched all the operations going forward in the room; saw the curtains put up, and the nice, clean, white sheets put on the bed, and the clean counterpane, and the little toilet-table made to look so nice with its frilled muslin cover over its pink lining: she watched all this going forward, and then, anxious to do something herself for this dear sister, she put on a little make-believe apron and a clean night-cap, and calling herself Martha, the housemaid, set

about to dust and rub the chairs and writing-table, and all the nice little cut-glass scent bottles and boxes which stood on the toilet-table. Oh, how happy was Meggy! The bedroom was ready, and the next day her dear sister would come.

And now it was the next day; the last breakfast without her was eaten—the last dinner; and she was to be at home by six o'clock. At breakfast their papa said that he and their mamma were going in a carriage to meet Mary at Euston Square station about four miles off, and that Herbert and Meggy should go with them, for that there would be plenty of room. This was quite a joyful surprise to the children. They did not often go from home; very seldom indeed in a carriage; and therefore when such an indulgence was permitted to them, it made them very happy.

They were so grateful for this unexpected pleasure that they worked very industriously at their lessons that day. They knew that it always pleased their mamma when they were industrious and tried to do their best, and they did so this day.

What happy hearts they had, and what bright faces when the last little lesson was done, and they had now only to be washed and dressed, and then the carriage would be at the door to take them all on such a joyful errand.

And now the carriage came, and out they rushed

and sprang into it; and out came their papa and mamma, and they too got in, and then they all drove away, the children almost ready to scream for delight.

I do not know whether we have said so, but we ought to have done so, that Herbert was fond of all kind of excitement. A horrible story put him quite into a state of agreeable terror; he liked, or rather he fancied he should like, to see strange and dismal sights. But he had had very little experience of any thing that was dismal or horrible, so he was not a very good judge. However, he had often wished to see a dead horse. He knew that horses died, but as yet he had only seen them alive, and yet two several times his brother had come home and said that he had seen a dead horse in a cart; a black one or a white one, lying stiff and stark, and looking so huge and horrible. Herbert shuddered at such relations, but yet he felt in the bottom of his heart, and he said so too, that he should like to see a dead horse!

On this pleasant afternoon, seated in a comfortable carriage beside his dear little sister Meggy, he had his wish gratified. They had not gone far before they came to a crowd of people. A little cart, which belonged to some potters or pedlers, stood by the road-side, and just beside it lay the horse which had drawn it, but which, taken out of

the shafts, now lay quite dead on the road. It was a very poor, lean horse—a miserable object; beside it stood its equally poor master and his wife, and their little ragged half-starved children. All stood looking at the horse in the utmost state of dismay and grief; the children were crying, and the man and his wife seemed ready to do so too. They had had a great loss;—their poor lean and patient slave was dead, and how were they to supply his place!

It was altogether a very sad sight, and Herbert having now seen a dead horse, found it much more affecting than he had expected. He said very little about it; nor did his mamma, but she hoped that he was for the present, at least, quite satisfied with horrid sights.

CHAP. VIII.

MARY'S ARRIVAL.

When Herbert and Meggy and their parents reached the railway station, they found that they were twenty minutes too soon; so, while their mamma sat in the carriage, their papa took them and showed them all that was going on. There was a train just about setting off, so they watched the people running with their boxes and bundles, taking their seats in a great hurry, and then the man rung his bell, and those who were yet behindhand ran all the faster, till at last every body was seated, and then there were only the guards locking the carriage doors, and the men offering newspapers beside the carriages, and then the steam screamed and puffed out, and then the engine began working, and away they went. The next thing was that the porters began to assemble on the side where the children were, and then cabs, and carriages, and omnibuses drove in, all, like themselves, come to wait for arrivals.

And now the train from Birmingham was heard coming up; and now the engine was taken off, and men pushed on the train till it came under the shed, where all were waiting and in readiness.

The children's mamma got out of the carriage, and now heads were popped out of the railway carriages, old men, and young men and women, and little boys and young ladies — and there, just in the very midmost carriage looked out their dear sister, smiling and seeming as glad to recognise them as they were to recognise her.

The train stopped. The doors were opened, and out stepped all the passengers, and among the rest their own sweet sister: — and what boxes, and hampers, and baskets, and bags she seemed to have with her! They kissed her, and she kissed them; and a porter carried her things to the carriage, and in she got, and in their mamma got, and in they got, and then, last of all, in came papa; and the boxes, and the bags, and the baskets were stowed, one here and another there, and away they drove.

What a happy thing it was to have that dear, kind sister back with them again — she who had seen Abijah Bucket. In the very gladness of his heart, Herbert could not help asking about old Abijah.

Their sister had a new little basket on her knee; she had brought it in her hand out of the railway carriage, and now she kept it very carefully on her knee. It seemed quite full of very neat little packets. Meggy wondered what was in it, and so did Herbert, but they did not like to ask, only Meggy

remarked that it was a new basket, meaning thereby to turn her sister's thoughts to it. And she must have done so, for almost directly Mary said, looking down to the basket, —

"I have something here which I brought for you from Derby;" and with this she took a neat little packet, folded up so carefully in nice white paper, and she said, —

"Guess, now, what is here?"

The children guessed cakes and figs, and a little box, and many other things, none of which were right; and then their mamma, who knew very well what sort of things might be bought in Derby, guessed a bird's nest.

"You shall see," said their sister, and opened the packet; and there, sure enough, was a little bird's nest, just as if it had been made by a real bird, of moss and hair, and it was only made of spar, which was coloured to look like them. Within it there lay four little spar eggs, white spotted with brown, so like eggs that nobody who had not touched them could have believed them to be stone. The children admired it wonderfully, and declared that their sister could not have pleased them better than by bringing them such a present.

"I am not quite sure whether I have not something which you will admire even more than this," said their sister, and she took out another, and then

another little packet. She opened them both. They both contained cake; the one a thick slice of delicious bride-cake, full of currants, rich and brown, with a layer of almonds an inch thick, and then covered over with sugar — the other was a nice flat queen-cake.

"Oh, how good!" exclaimed both children at once, feeling as if they longed for a bite.

"May I taste a bit?" asked Meggy.

"Yes, certainly," said their sister.

"Oh dear, how hard!" cried Herbert, trying to break off a morsel of the bride-cake.

"Oh dear, how hard!" cried Meggy, trying to break the queen-cake — "I can't get any!" said she, looking puzzled.

Herbert in the mean time was turning the bride-cake over and over.

"I believe it is nothing but stone!" at length he said: "I believe it is all a sham!"

"And so is mine!" exclaimed Meggy.

"It must have been sent by Mr. Bucket," said the father laughing. Herbert was delighted. "Oh yes!" he exclaimed, "dear old Friend Bucket has sent us some cake! What fun we shall have when we get home with Alfred!"

"Yes," said Meggy, delighted, "we will ask Ellen and Alfred and every body to have a bit of Mr. Bucket's cake!"

CHAP. IX.

THE CHILDREN HAVE A VISITOR, AND THE VISITOR'S SORROW.

A GENTLEMAN came on a visit to Herbert's and Meggy's parents, and brought with him his little nephew Henry. Henry was an orphan, and his uncle had taken him to live with him as his son. The uncle and nephew were as dear to each other as parent and child. Henry was about eleven years old; he could play therefore with either Alfred or Herbert, or they could all three play together.

He was excessively fond of all kinds of tame and pet animals, especially of birds, and soon after they had come to London his uncle had bought him three birds — two canaries and a chaffinch. These birds were in cages, very beautiful and fine singers, and Henry wished of all things to have taken them with him when he went to Herbert's and Meggy's. His uncle, however, thought it best to leave them in charge of the mistress of the house where they had taken lodgings. She seemed a very good kind of woman, and promised to take great care of them. Henry thought a deal about his birds, and even

dreamed that they were sitting perched on his finger, and that he was chirping to them.

One day his uncle brought him very bad news from London; the two canaries were dead; the last had died that morning, and he brought it in a little paper bag. Henry cried when he saw the little dead body of his favourite, and the next day Alfred said he would go with him, and they two would bring home the remaining bird in his cage. It was quite an interesting journey to them; and Alfred, one of whose favourite places in London was the Polytechnic Institution, took Henry there, and showed him all the wonders of the place; he was weighed in the patent weighing machine; they saw the diving-bell go down; they tried the electrical machine; they went and saw the glass-blower at work, and brought away spun glass and a glass ship; and, last of all, they saw the magnified figures and the dissolving views. Henry was delighted, and Alfred, who rather prided himself on his scientific knowledge, had the pleasure of explaining all they saw. They then went for the bird, and tying the cage up in a handkerchief, brought it safely home. The cage was hung in the nursery, but the poor bird, spite of all the care that was taken of it by all of them, died like its companions in a few days.

The children's hearts were very sad, especially

Henry's and Meggy's, to whom the little stiff dead body presented a very sorrowful spectacle. Henry longed for a bird, a bird of his own training, and he began to think that really he would catch one for himself. It was now the middle of March, and extremely cold and winterly; the ground was frozen quite hard, and the little birds hopped about the doors and windows looking for any crumbs they might find.

Alfred who had sympathised with poor Henry in his loss, told him that nothing would be easier than to catch a bird, and as soon as he had a little time, he would set him such a good trap as would be sure to take one. He soon found a little time, and the trap was set. Alfred told Henry that he should not wonder if he caught a bird that very day.

A pair of blackbirds came hopping about the grass plot every day. They had lived there two summers, and the whole family were very fond of them; they built in the garden, and never were allowed to be molested. Henry did not know this. He thought of all things he should like a blackbird; he told Alfred so, and Alfred, who having never caught a blackbird in all his life, and who believed them too wise to be caught, laughed, and said yes, if Henry caught a blackbird he might have it.

Henry thought of nothing but catching a black-

bird; he knew that they sung beautifully in cages, and he had heard his uncle say that of all birds he should prefer having a blackbird. His uncle was then absent for a few days, and Henry determined to present him with one of these birds on his return.

Alfred had a large wicker cage, in which a jackdaw had lived last summer, and this Herbert, who entered into all Henry's plans, borrowed to have in readiness. The trap was set in the most skilful manner according to Alfred's method, and Alfred also lent Henry some books which treated on the management of tame birds. Henry read, and became very knowing. Alfred, who had a great many lessons to do and but little time to spare, contrived, nevertheless, now and then, to run out with Henry to look what was taken when the top of the trap had fallen. Sparrows, and robins, and tomtits were caught; but as none of these satisfied Henry's ambition, they were always speedily released again.

It happened, however, one morning, when Alfred was too deeply engaged to have a moment's time to spare either for birds or little boys, and Herbert and Henry were in the garden together, they saw the trap down: something was caught; they ran and peeped in. Oh! joy and wonder! There really was a blackbird, with its full brown plumage

and its yellow bill! Never had two boys been so delighted before.

"Run and fetch the cage, Herbert!" said Henry.

Herbert, forgetting all the prohibition about taking blackbirds, ran and fetched it in a moment.

The bird was carefully caught and thrust into the cage. What affection they felt for it! they would not have hurt a feather. They carried the cage up stairs into the nursery to show Meggy and Ellen.

Henry had already prepared such food and sand as would be needful in case a blackbird was caught.

"Must we catch blackbirds?" asked Meggy, half unwilling to damp her joy by the thought that *would* intrude.

"Alfred said we might have a blackbird if we could catch it!" said Henry triumphantly.

In course of time Alfred's lessons were all done, and he was shown the beautiful prize.

"You must never take the blackbirds, Henry!" exclaimed Alfred quite fiercely, and without expressing the least sympathy with Henry's joy.

"Why not?" asked Henry: "you said, if I caught one I might have it: I have caught it, and it is mine!"

"You *did* say so, Alfred!" said Herbert; "you

did, Alfred; and you ought to be glad that Henry has been so lucky!"

"Why you know, Herbert," said Alfred, turning angrily to him, "that we never hurt or frighten the blackbirds — you know that well enough!"

"But I shall keep this now I have got it!" said Henry.

"I will never lend *my* cage, however, to keep a blackbird in!" said Alfred; and taking up the cage he carried it down stairs.

"Are the blackbirds to be caught, mamma?" asked Alfred from his mother, who was reading.

"No, certainly not: I would not have the blackbirds frightened or distressed on any account," replied his mother, without making any inquiry as to the meaning of his question.

Armed with this authority, Alfred opened the cage door, and the blackbird flew away. Henry, who had quietly followed Alfred down stairs, burst into tears. Herbert stood also at the door, and, though he knew the established law in favour of blackbirds, he could not resist a feeling of anger and indignation on account of the arbitrary power which Alfred seemed so unkindly to have exercised.

The true case was immediately stated to the mother, and she too thought that Alfred had exercised his power in an unfeeling manner. She told him that the bird to Henry was something like

what the poor man's lamb, in the Bible, was to him: the rich man came and took it away from him by force. Alfred had done so by the bird.

Alfred sat and pondered in silence. He felt angry and out of humour, and yet a sense of his own unkindness was heavy at his heart. An hour or two afterwards he stood by the dining-room fire, where his sister also was sitting; he looked very thoughtful and sad.

"I am very sorry," said he, "that I have been so unkind to Henry, and as he wishes so much for a blackbird, he shall have one. I know where a bird trainer lives, and from him I will buy him one. Will not that be a compensation for my injustice?"

His sister approved of the idea; and she was quite sure that Henry would accept the bird which he would give him in the spirit of love and kindness.

Herbert, who in his indignation had said that he never would speak to Alfred again, and who had kept by Henry's side in his trouble, trying all in his power to comfort him, was quite satisfied when he heard his brother's resolution.

"Yes, dear Alfred," said he, "buy him a blackbird that has lived in a cage all its life, and give him the cage too!—that will be nice!"

Alfred and Herbert kissed each other; they felt how happy love and kindness made them, and they did not rest until Henry was as happy as themselves.

CHAP. X.

MARY'S LITTLE LESSON ABOUT THE GARDEN.

MEGGY loved her elder sister. It was a pleasure to her to know that she was in the house; whenever she was from home, for even one day, she missed her very much. "When will that dear creature come back?" she would say; and when she came, it always made her feel happy. She liked to sit down near her when she was drawing, or at any kind of needle-work, and to draw and work like her. Meggy loved this dear sister so much, because she was so very kind to her.

Mary and Meggy often had long conversations together; there was something very mild and affectionate in this dear elder sister's voice and manner, which had great influence on Meggy. Mary wished her to overcome all her little faults; and whenever they had conversation on such subjects, it gave Meggy strength to try to do her best towards overcoming them.

Mary and Meggy often talked about the minds and hearts of every body being like gardens: if the garden be not cultivated, weeds are sure to spring up. Meggy knew that this was the very case in her own garden. She had also often seen

pieces of ground which had lain waste, even for a few months, and what a crop of weeds were there always sure to spring up; now and then a thistle; now and then a nettle, and always a plentiful crop of groundsel, and shepherd's purse, and chickweed; and then all these, after they had once been allowed to flower, had such a wonderful faculty of scattering their seed, that in a very short time the earth would seem to be full of them! These were very familiar images to the mind of the little girl, and she knew enough of gardens, and of the nature and growth of wild plants, to be able still further to carry out the idea.

Some pieces of land there are, whether gardens or fields it matters not, which are overrun with wild bind-weed, twitch, or ground-ash; the fibry roots of these plants spread every where; the tiller of the ground fancies that he has dug them all up, and will not be troubled with them any more; he plants sweet-smelling and beautiful flowers, or useful plants of various kinds, and thinks to himself, "Now I shall have pleasure in that piece of ground; now I shall have a bed of carnations, or a fine crop of peas! I have made an end of all those troublesome weeds which have annoyed me so long!" He rejoices in all the labour he has had, and the reward which he expects; when, lo! up come the very weeds which he thought he had

rooted out; one here and another there. He pulls at a tender sprout—it breaks off short. Again he hopes it is done for—but no! its roots are yet in the ground, full of strength and life, and the next week, or the week after that, it is up again; and if by any chance or oversight it is left for a month or two, the weeds are found to be stronger than the flowers, if not to have overrun them entirely.

Meggy knew very well how to apply this image of a garden to herself. Her sister told her that by care and attention her own nature might be like a beautiful garden, well kept and stored with every lovely and precious plant and flower, full of sunshine and gladness; the different features of the character vary one from another, like the beds in the flower-garden: in one yellow predominates; in another red, in another blue, in another white; but all bear a beautiful and harmonious relation the one to the other; the one adorns and sets off the other. In every garden, weeds *will* spring; but the careful, clever gardener does his best to keep them down, if he cannot quite root them out.

Let no dear child be disheartened; let no loving, anxious mother despair; fair flowers will repay cultivation, and weeds, even nettles and thistles, with their insinuating roots, may be plucked out, by love and care.

Meggy was a little garden, in which were set the

sweetest of flowers; but there were weeds and the seeds of weeds in its soil, and she herself had, at times, trouble enough with them.

Exactly in the same way as some gardens or pieces of ground seem predisposed to the growth of some particular weed; as, for instance, nettles, rank, stinging nettles, grow peculiarly in some soils, so are some natures passionate and irritable, and if you touch them, you only get stung, as it were, for your pains. Then there is vanity, that most insinuating of all weeds, which, like the twitch and the ground-ash, has its small fibrous roots under ground, shooting up here and there, most difficult to be got rid of. Every thing seems to foster and feed its growth; it comes up when and where you least expect it, and you are quite at your wits' end to know how to root it out.

It was a little weed of this description which was the bane of Meggy's garden; many a fair white lily of self-denial was spoiled by it; many a little rose of love, and many a sweet-scented violet of kindness was overrun by it. It might be seen to peep out in her willingness to sit for hours as a model, when her sister was drawing; it might be discovered in the pains which she took to learn difficult knitting; above all things it might be seen in her love of personal adornment, in the gay colours of a ribbon, or the fancied elegance of an old veil.

Meggy will work hard in her little garden to root out this bad weed, and if she work in good faith, and root out vanity, even from her very attempts to get rid of it, the good soil of the little garden will in time be freed from it; and then the roses, and the lilies, and the violets of love, and self-forgetfulness, and purity of heart, will grow up abundantly, without any canker or blight, and taller than the tallest of weeds could ever rise.

This was a little moral lesson. Meggy understood every word of it, and endeavoured to profit by it.

CHAP. XI.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE, AND THE KITCHEN RANGE.

HERBERT and Meggy had great pleasure in playing at living in a house, and of having furniture and servants of their own, and of being servants themselves. They played at having a house in the nursery every day; they enclosed a little space with chairs, and played that the window-seats were rooms — for theirs was an old-fashioned house, and many of the windows had seats in them, which they thus found a great convenience. One window-seat they called a parlour, and another a kitchen, or else they fancied them to be chambers.

They had a great deal of pleasure in pretending that they had a deal of trouble in their lives; there was no fun without they had trouble and a deal to do, so sometimes they fancied that a great wind came and blew part of their house down, so that all their things fell into the utmost confusion, and they had all to put to rights again. One of their favourite troubles was the having a bad neighbour; they called her Mrs. Gingham, and used to play that as soon as they had set their house in order, and had gone out to take a walk, she came and upset every thing. It was wonderful how much

they seemed to have to endure from this neighbour; but they evidently would have been very sorry to have been without her, for without her they would have had much less to do, and it is the having plenty to do which makes the lives both of children and grown people pleasant.

They had many contrivances to make a good fire-place in their house, and often wished that they had a real one. One day their mamma went into London, and as she was returning she passed St. Paul's Churchyard. It was getting quite dusk, but there stood a little boy near the pavement, not above ten years old, who looked very thin and pale, and had a very anxious expression of face. He held in his hand a little kitchen-range made of japanned tin with bright bars; it seemed very strong, and well made, and was very complete indeed. There were a great many things, such as pots and kettles, beside. The little boy held these in his hand, and said in a very melancholy voice, "All these for only one shilling!"

The children's mamma saw the boy and the little things he had to sell, and heard what he said, but she walked on. She could not help being touched by the boy's pale face and melancholy voice, and as soon as she had passed him, she thought that it would be only kind to buy this from him, and then she remembered how pleased

Herbert and Meggy would be with this little kitchen-range for their house. She turned back, and asked the boy if he would carry it for her to the omnibus at the Bank, if she bought it from him. He said he would, and seemed at the same time quite grateful to her for thinking of buying any thing from him.

He had very old shoes on, and went shuffling along with a deal of trouble; besides this he had a great bundle on his back, which, on inquiry, the children's mamma found to contain other little ranges, and cooking and kitchen utensils, like those he had in his hand. She made the little boy walk by her side, and she talked with him as they went along. He said that he and his step-father, who was a tinman by trade, made these little things; they stopped at home two or three days making them, and then, when they had a good stock, they went out to sell them. He said that he was twelve years old, and had very bad health; he fancied, that working in a hot room, and then going out in the cold weather, and standing about in his poor thin clothes, made him take bad colds, and so he never was well. He said there were five children, and that he was the oldest of them; his own father was dead, and his mother had married again, but his step-father was kind to him. He could neither read nor write, and had

never been to school; his own father used to teach him a little in an evening; but now they had to work so hard, and were so poor, they had no time for learning.

The children's mamma asked him what was the greatest number of little ranges that he ever sold in a day. He said, that once he sold seven, and then he was pleased; but that now he seldom sold above one or two. "I have only sold this one to-day," said he, in his melancholy voice, "and I have been out ever since eight o'clock this morning, and it is so cold!" It *was* a very cold evening; the children's mamma was cold, though she was well wrapt up; she was very sorry for the little boy, and spoke kindly to him; she thanked him for carrying the things to the omnibus, and then gave him sixpence for his trouble.

As she went home, she thought of the great delight all these things would give to Herbert and Meggy; she found them sitting with their papa and elder brother and sister comfortably round the fire. She did not tell them at first what a many things she had brought, but only carried in at first the little range itself.

"See," said she, "will not this make your house complete?"

The children jumped for joy and clapped their hands.

"This is a very nice range," she said, "and see, there is a capital fender belonging to it! It only wants a few kettles and saucepans."

The children thought that kettles and saucepans would indeed make it complete! She went out of the room for a moment, and brought in the most perfect little kettles and saucepans that ever were seen; there was a tea-kettle and a fish-kettle, and two saucepans, one large and the other small.

"Oh! how beautiful!" exclaimed the children, beginning to arrange them on the hobs and bars of their little range. "Never was any thing so beautiful seen before! Thank you, dearest, dearest mamma!"

"I think," said their mamma, "that a little Dutch oven, and a hanging-bar, and a couple of smoothing-irons would not be amiss!"

The children looked at her in amazement, and then looked at one another, and laughed, as if they thought there was some strange magic at work. "Oh, they would be nice!" exclaimed they at length. No sooner was this said, than their mamma placed these things before them. Their papa and brother and sister were by this time as much astonished as themselves. Every body laughed, and said that mamma was a conjurer.

"A very nice little kitchen range is this!" said

she, gravely, "only it would be very inconvenient to bring coal to the fire in a kettle."

"A kettle!" said the children; "people never carry coal in a kettle, but in a coal-box!"

"But where is your coal-box?" asked their mamma.

They had never thought about that.

"I must try to find you a coal-box," said she, smiling, and the next moment set down before them the prettiest little japanned coal-box that ever was seen.

"And then," said their mamma, "when you want to stir your fire, you must not use your fingers, else you would burn yourselves, you know; so here is a poker, and a fire-shovel and tongs; and when you want to carry away your dust, you must not take a spoon — that would be very untidy — so here is a regular dust-pan; and then, as some day or other you may like to dine on fried eggs, see, here is a frying-pan and an egg-slice, only we take no notice of the egg-slice being as big as the frying-pan — that's of no consequence, you know."

Nobody interrupted the mamma in all this long speech; but she had now done, for she had come to the end of all the things. And then there was a burst of wonder and admiration. Never had such things been dreamed of. At tea she told them about the poor little pale-faced boy with the melancholy

voice, from whom she had bought them, and they wished that they had him there then, to give him some warm tea and bread and butter, and a pair of good shoes. They would have thought even more about him than they did, if they had not been so much occupied with thinking of their new kitchen range, and all their pans and kettles.

CHAP. XII.

THE ROOKS AND THE SPARROWS.

SPRING came on; the sparrows began to build, and the rooks were very busy in the old rookery just beside the garden. They were heard cawing early and late, and were seen flying into all the trees round about for sticks. As people lay in bed in a morning, if they looked out, they would see the rooks come and settle on the tree-tops, which were on a level with the upper windows, and break off little branches with their beaks and fly away with them to their own trees. The rooks quarrelled a great deal among themselves; the children often stood and watched them for a long time together, and they saw how they went on. They stole one another's sticks, and if a sentinel had not been left to watch those that remained at home, they would have pillaged the half-built nests of those that were gone away. Herbert and Meggy took the greatest interest in the rooks.

The entire back of the house where the children lived, was covered with ivy; it grew very wild and thick, and great numbers of sparrows built in it, and roosted every night among its leaves. In the winter Meggy had fed the sparrows; she had

given them names, and fancied that she knew them all one from the other. She considered the sparrows to be her own, and was very fond of them. In the spring the ivy was cut: it was cut very close to the wall, so that there was no chance for the sparrows to build or roost in it again — that year at least. It was very amusing to the children to see the men on their long ladders, clipping away the green ivy till only the bare branches, with their innumerable little fibry arms, were left; but when Meggy thought of her sparrows she was very sorry.

As evening came on the sparrows became very uneasy; they flew up against the bare walls, as if trying to find shelter, and then flew away again into a large tree not far from a window where the children's mamma was watching them. The tree was full of them, they fluttered about from branch to branch, and chattered and twittered about, and chattered again, and seemed very angry and uneasy. It was just as if any body going to bed had found all the sheets and blankets gone, and there was nothing left to cover them. Such an event as this certainly had not occurred to the sparrows before; they flew about and chattered, and almost screamed, for astonishment. But there was plenty of old wild ivy in a long wall in the garden for them to roost in, so nobody made themselves unhappy about them, and in a day or two they seemed to be quite satis-

fied with their new quarters; and before long, sparrows' nests were to be seen in spouts and corners, and wherever else they could stick them.

Before many weeks had passed, young rooks were heard sending forth their cries from the nests in the tall elm trees, which now began to be almost green with their young leaves. The children watched the busy parent rooks feeding them, and Herbert had great pleasure in pointing out to his mother and sisters which among the birds that flew about were starlings, that lived among the rooks, and which might be considered as a sort of distant relation of theirs that built in the same trees, and were allowed by the rooks to associate with them.

CHAP. XIII.

THE HOUSE IN THE GARDEN, AND THE MISFORTUNES THAT HAPPENED THERE.

The children played now many hours each day in the garden, and as they still had great pleasure in playing at living in a house, they began to consider where their house must be. But there was no long consideration needed for this. There was, in a secluded part of the garden, a little tool-house; there was a little sort of rustic porch to it, overshadowed by a flowery acacia, and the whole front was overrun with ivy and a Scotch rose. It consisted of two rooms, the inner one of which had a little casement window of four panes; here, in former times, Alfred had kept his guinea pigs, but it was now filled with rubbish. This was the place which of all others Herbert and Meggy wished to have for their house, both rooms were so pleasant. The first looked out from its door under the acacia tree, and the other had such a pretty picturesque window, which would open and shut, and which was surrounded with ivy. The children fancied that the little old woman who lived in the wood with her dog and bird in one of Tieck's fairy tales, had just such a little room and such a little window as this.

Nobody can tell how charming it was to Herbert and Meggy to shut themselves up in this pretty little house. They fancied a great many charming things about it which they told to nobody, and as their father saw that they enjoyed it so much, he said that it should be theirs, and that nobody should disturb them in it.

Oh, how charming it was when the sun shone through the little window, and the bright form of the four little panes lay on the floor! There was a shelf, not a high one, but a very broad and strong one, in the first room, and this they called "up-stairs." Their mamma lent them a nice little step-ladder, and this they placed against the shelf, and it was the staircase. They set the doll's cradle on the shelf, and all such things as made it look like a bed-room, and here they used to put the two dolls, Sophia and Alice, to sleep, while they were busy about their household work. They found in a lumber room a piece of old Indian matting, with which they covered the floor of the inner room, and then they put a board across the first room to divide it into two parts; and thus they had a hall and a kitchen, while the little inner apartment was a grand drawing-room. One day their friend Henry came to see them, and he put up two little lower shelves for them, one in each room; and these were chimney-pieces. The beautiful kitchen range which their

mamma had given them was of course put in its place; a set of little candlesticks and other things stood on the mantel-piece; a fire was always supposed to be burning in the grate, and a pot always was on the fire; the coal box was filled with tidy little pieces of coal, and nothing could be prettier or more complete than the whole place. They decorated their walls with little pictures, and hung up a smart yellow cord and tassel for a bell; they hung some lilac ribbon, which had once trimmed their sister's bonnet, festoon-wise above their window, and these were their handsome curtains. They got the gardener to give them some cuttings of evergreens, and these they set in little pots and placed them in the window, which looked, as they thought, most beautifully. They invited many people to go and see them in their house, and nothing could make them happier than having visitors.

It was still a favourite amusement to them to play at having a troublesome and bad neighbour. They played that the same Mrs. Gingham, who had disturbed them so much in their other house, had, like themselves, removed, and that she now lived just by them in the melon-bed, and that whenever their backs were turned, she came and put all their things into disorder. They pretended that she had a husband as bad as herself, and children a great deal worse.

"Why do you not play that Mrs. Gingham is a good useful neighbour?" asked somebody, one day, "and that she has a friendly husband and good children?"

"It would not be half as funny if she were," replied they, "and then we have always such a deal to do after any of the Ginghams have been."

Pleasant as this playing at a house was, it did not always happen that Herbert and Meggy perfectly and entirely agreed about things; trouble even arose now and then between themselves. Sometimes Meggy wanted the fish-kettle to be on the fire, when Herbert persisted that they had dined, and therefore the tea-kettle must be put on; and if one of them was not in a humour to yield to the other, a deal more would be said about it than such a trifle deserved.

Once the children troubled themselves about a very foolish thing. Their papa was walking in the garden and saw Herbert standing on the grass, and looking in great perplexity and trouble. He was standing by himself, and was making circles with his foot, with his heel for the centre; his hands were clasped together, and he evidently was not thinking about the circles he was making. His papa walked towards him, and then Herbert looked up.

"Papa," said he, in a doleful voice, after a mo-

ment's silence, "what must we do? for Meggy says she will never come out of our house again as long as she lives!"

"That is a strange fancy," said the father, "but what is the reason of that? perhaps she finds it so very pleasant; or perhaps you have vexed her?" suggested he.

"No," said Herbert, looking at the same time sorely perplexed; "I've been doing nothing to her; I've only been working in her garden, and now she says she will not come out of the house, and I don't believe she ever will."

"Let us go and see what is amiss with her," said the father, and walked towards the play-house. Herbert came on slowly behind, looking as if he thought it a very hopeless affair.

When the father reached the door of the little house, he looked in, and there sat Meggy, on a large flower-pot, turned upside down, which was one of the house chairs, with all her household things in confusion about her, and looking herself very forlorn and miserable; the tears were on her dirty little face, and in one hand she held the corner of her little apron, with which she had been wiping them away. Her father stood in the doorway, and Herbert behind him, but at a little distance.

"Well, Meggy," said her father, "what are you sitting there for?"

"I am not coming out again!" said Meggy, and fresh tears began to flow.

"It will be rather uncomfortable living here, winter and summer, night and day," said her father, "but you can try it; however, in the first place, let us know what is amiss?"

"I shall not come out again!" said Meggy, passionately.

"Very well," said the father; "but I want to know why?"

"Because Herbert is so unkind — he has done *such a thing!*" said she.

Herbert, who stood near enough to hear every word that passed, now broke a little stick in two, which he was playing with, and looked more perplexed than ever.

"What has he done?" asked her father.

"Oh, *such a thing!*" said she; "he has buried a dead blackbird, that smelt disagreeably, in my garden. Was not it shocking?"

Herbert was just ready to run away, but he stopped one minute to hear his father's reply.

"Never mind that!" said he, quite cheerfully; "and never stop for ever in your house, for such a thing as that!"

"Now, was it so very bad, papa?" asked Herbert, coming boldly forward, "and need Meggy stop in her house because of it?"

"I should think not, certainly," said he; "but Herbert, if you have any more blackbirds to bury, bury them either in your own garden, or in mine. I should have no objection, nor would you, but Meggy has, you see, and therefore you must bear that in mind."

Meggy rose up from her flower-pot; her father wiped away her tears, and Herbert said he would dig the old blackbird up from her garden, if she liked, but it was very deep. Meggy asked her father what he thought about it; he advised that it should remain where it was. Meggy was satisfied, and Herbert very much pleased.

Another day also a great misfortune befell. They had found in that same lumber-room, where they found the Indian matting, a large china dish; it had, to be sure, a great piece broken out of one side; but that did not at all matter They brought it down, washed it at the garden water-tubs, and reared it upon a shelf in their house, where it looked very grand. One day they played that they were the servants of the house, and that as the family were away, they were going to have a general cleaning. All their pots and pans, all their chairs and tables, all their crockery and wooden ware, were carried out, and the whole place was swept and cleaned out.

Servants often break things, thought Herbert to

himself, and so in carrying the grand china dish to its place again, what should he do, but drop it down on the hard floor on purpose.

"There now, what will our *missis* say?" exclaimed he, ready to laugh.

Meggy looked round in a moment; she could hardly believe her eyes. The china dish was broken, and Herbert looked ready to laugh.

"Oh, Herbert! are not you sorry?" exclaimed she.

Herbert did not say he was; Meggy could see mischief in the corners of his eyes and mouth. She forgot in a moment that she was playing at being a servant, and she felt at once like the mistress, and was very angry.

"You have broken our china dish — our beautiful china dish — and you are not sorry! You naughty boy! What are we to do now without our beautiful china dish?"

Herbert said they had plenty of things left; they had plenty of dishes without that; but Meggy felt at that moment as if all their household goods, all their pots, and pans, and dishes, were of no value in comparison with this one which was broken.

She said, she wondered how he could think of doing such a thing! she wished she had never asked him to help her! How shabby the house would look without the china dish.

Herbert was now rather sorry for breaking the dish; he told Meggy so, and said he only thought of having some fun; he was himself afraid now that they should miss it. He proposed that they should play that it was a great misfortune, and Meggy agreed. They both picked up the broken pieces, and ever after spoke of it as "that unfortunate dish."

CHAP. XIV.

PLEASANT SPRING TIME, AND HOW THE HOUSE GOT BETTER FURNISHED.

How happy a time was this spring! As soon as Herbert had finished his lessons, he went out into the garden. He and Meggy had found another treasure among the things in the lumber-room, and this was a very narrow Venetian blind; their mamma said that they might have it to put up in their house. It was just the right width for their window, and though it was a deal too long, they never thought about that. A carpenter who happened to be at work just then on the premises fixed it up for them. It looked most beautifully both within and without; it looked quite elegant, they thought. Their mamma also gave them an old bell, and they had that beautiful yellow cord and tassel which had hung in their house for a bell rope. Alfred was very kind to them when he saw what great pleasure they took in their house; he helped them to furnish it and make it complete. He hung the little old bell so cleverly for them, that it rung at their door and into all their rooms also; he put up bell pulls for them, and after that they made it a rule, that if any body came to pay

them a visit, they must always ring at the door bell, and then Herbert or Meggy had the pleasure of coming out as the servant, and receiving the company. Oh! how happy that little old bell made them! Alfred made them also a little wash-hand stand for their bedroom, and a little bedstead with hangings and all quite complete. It is true that the wash-stand was rather bigger than the bedstead, but that was of no consequence at all; the chamber looked very nice, and they had the utmost delight in keeping every thing in order. The better the house was furnished, the less they played at being troubled with bad neighbours.

After the bell was put up, they re-arranged and almost refurnished their drawing-room; they put a bright-coloured cover on the table, and laid little books on it; they turned nice new flower-pots of various sizes upside down for seats; they set flowers in water in little bottles and pretty little cups here and there, and made it look like a real drawing-room.

Outside of their house they had now two dogs in their kennels. They turned two flower-pots on their sides, and laid a little hay in them; these were the dog kennels; they took two empty cotton reels, and tied them with longish pieces of strong thread inside the kennels; these were their dogs. One of them was red, and the other white; the red one

was a mastiff, very fierce indeed; the other was a nice little white terrier. People often heard the big fierce dog barking when they came near the house.

Herbert's and Meggy's delight in their house and the garden increased only the more as the long hot summer days came on. It was very shady and cool and pleasant there, and there they spent all their spare time. It was particularly delightful to them if a shower came on when they were in their house — a right heavy shower — then they were pleased, for then it seemed as if the house were all their own; as if they were living quite away from every body else, almost as if they were on a desert island.

CHAP. XV.

HERBERT'S BIRDS AND INSECTS.

WHEN Herbert stood to watch the rooks, he stood in a long walk by the side of which ran an old brick wall. It was a very charming old wall; on the top of it there grew the white and crimson snap-dragon, and yellow wallflowers, and as it faced the south it was covered almost entirely with roses and white and yellow jasmine. It was not so entirely covered, however, but that Herbert could see that it was inhabited by a great many busy little bees. Nobody told him about the bees; he found them all out himself, and that was a delight. The old mortar between the bricks was full of holes, and Herbert saw the bees go in and then come out again from these holes. Scarcely any thing ever gave him so much pleasure before. He stood for an hour at a time to watch them, and if any body would come and stand with him and hear all he could tell them about the bees, he was much obliged to them, but if not, then he stood and watched them himself. Meggy did not much care about the bees; she would look at them just to please him for a few minutes, but then she was always in a hurry to run away again. Herbert,

however, stood patiently, and learned many things about the bees, by his own observation; some of them were mason bees, and worked very industriously in their holes, making a cell, laying eggs, and then walling it all up with clay. Some of the bees were much larger than others, and these he called his humble bees; sometimes these big bees were very sluggish, and then there came little active brown bees buzzing about them and creeping over them; Herbert thought that they came to torment and to sting the heavy humble bees. He felt quite distressed and angry about this; it seemed to him so unkind of the little active bees to do so, and his eyes were full of tears when he told his mamma about it. He would so gladly, if he could, have helped the poor weak, clumsy, humble bees.

When the days were sunny and hot, how busy the bees were! Little brown bees, as brisk and active as flies, and a greyish yellow kind, and black ones, all of them lived in the wall; and, besides the bees, he had great pleasure in watching a kind of fly, which, however, but very rarely used its wings, but went rapidly moving about on the walls among the bees' holes; it was of a beautiful green and crimson colour, and shone in the sun like precious stones.

Herbert thought it very funny to see the bees

always come backwards out of their holes; and this little circumstance pleased him, because he could thus understand something about the inside of their holes. It proved to him that they were not wide enough for the bees to turn round in. They were long narrow passages, with a sort of little bed at the end in which they laid their eggs and their honey. He often wished that, just for a little while, he could be a bee, and live in a hole in the wall. It seemed very pleasant to him to have a house in that sunny wall all among the roses and the jasmines. He thought about it till he almost felt as if he were a bee. He studied the bees so attentively till he was quite sure that he knew every one, even when he saw him a good way from home. He used to say, "That bee lives under a branch of the Macartney rose;" or, "That fellow lives high up among the yellow jasmine;" and his mother thought he really was not mistaken, because when she had time to attend to them with him, she always found him right.

He used to bring out Meggy's little wheelbarrow and turn it upside down in the walk for his seat, and there, when he was tired of standing, he used to sit. There was not any thing in the whole garden which interested him more for a long time than the bees in the wall.

Herbert watched his bees until he saw them fasten

up all their holes with clay, and then he knew that they had left their eggs in these holes to hatch. He looked on the old wall with pleasure; it was now all covered with flowers, and he could not help fancying that the bees must have had a deal of pleasure in their summer work.

Besides the bees, he watched with great interest a colony of ants that lived under one of the gravel walks in the garden, and which seemed to pass all their time in crossing the walk and in coming up out of the holes on one side, and going down into the holes on the other. He wondered very much what they did this for; and he wondered what sort of underground world they had, but he could not tell. Many of them carried white little eggs down in their mouths, but many others seemed to have nothing with them, but came running up and crossing the walk, and running down on the other side, just as if that were the merriest thing in the world. There was a little busy stream of ants always going and coming, like a bustling street in London. Herbert felt very fond of the ants, and always begged people not to tread on them as they passed along; and whenever he could find a dead fly or spider he took it to the ants, and had the pleasure of seeing what a feast they had, and how, after they had eaten out the inside, they left nothing but a dry husk.

Herbert knew of many birds' nests in the garden; there was the blackbird's, and a fly-catcher's, and a robin's, and plenty of sparrows'. He loved the birds as well as the bees. He would sit and watch them flying about with their young ones. Now and then he happened to catch one. What a delight that was! Poor little thing, its heart would beat, and it would be all in a flutter, and it would cry piteously, but that was only because it did not know how much Herbert loved it. He was very glad to have a live bird in his hand; to see its beak, its eyes, its breast, its little legs — to know really what it was like. He wished he could make it understand how he loved it, and that he would not hurt it.

Whenever he caught a bird or a mouse, he thought of it for hours afterwards; he felt as if it were still in his hand long after it was gone, and he could not help talking to every body about it.

"What would that little bird say when I caught it?" he would ask, and nothing pleased him better than for somebody to imagine what it would say.

Herbert was very quick, both with his hands and his eyes. He could readily see the tracks of any small animal on the borders when nobody else could, without the closest observation. His mamma said that he was like an Indian in the forest, when set on the trail of an animal. He always was the

first to see any little lizard or shining beetle running along the grass; and he could always manage to catch them, let them run ever so fast. He often used to catch and carry his bees in his two hands, which he closed like a box for several minutes at a time, and he had great pleasure in hearing them hum as he thus held them, but they never stung him, most likely because he never hurt them.

The bees and the birds and the ants, as well as the little house in the garden, made Herbert very happy this summer.

CHAP. XVI.

THE HOUSE SET IN ORDER FOR THE GREAT PARTING.

After the midsummer of this year Herbert was to go to school—not as a day-scholar, but as a boarder; so that he would have to leave his home and his parents and his brother and sisters, but above all, he would have to leave his little sister Meggy, and that seemed a very great trouble to them both. Herbert, as far as himself was concerned, had no fear about going to school; he had never heard but that little boys were very happy at school, where they had a great many playfellows of their own age, and were taught by people who were very kind to them, and tried to make them all very happy. He rather liked the idea of going to school, for he knew the lady and gentleman with whom he was to be placed, and they lived not above two miles from his own home; and he was to come home every Saturday evening, and go again on Monday morning, so that it all seemed pleasant enough. There was only one thing that troubled him, and that was leaving Meggy, for he loved her very much, and they played so nicely together in their house in the garden, and Meggy called him her husband, and he called her his wife, and now that the summer days

were so long and so warm they were almost always together out of doors or in their house — yes, he should be sorry to part from Meggy, and that was the one thing that made him sad when he thought about going to school.

At length the day came when he was to go. He had some new clothes, and they were packed up in a nice little trunk, which his grandmamma made him a present of, and he had a new transparent slate, and a new knife, and a top, and some marbles, and these, too, were packed up, and he was to wear what had been his best dress every day, and it was such a fine morning, and he felt quite in a flutter, as if something very new and strange were going to happen. He did not know exactly how he felt, whether he were pleased or frightened or sorry, or what was amiss with him.

As soon as breakfast was over, he and Meggy went to their house to put every thing in order, for Herbert was not to go till after dinner, and they had the whole morning to do it in. They cleared all their things and arranged all their furniture in the most approved order; they put coal in their kitchen grate, and set the pots and kettles on the fire as if they were cooking a great dinner, and all their dishes and plates were ranged on their kitchen shelves; the little knife tray, with all the knives and forks in it, stood on the little

kitchen dresser, and it all looked as neat and tidy as if the cook who lived there were the fairy queen herself. They played that somebody had just told them that Mrs. Gingham and her husband and all her children were gone to America, so that they need no longer fear being troubled by them. They laid one of the dolls in bed in the little chamber; and their drawing-room they thought looked neater and more elegant than ever. There was a handsome piece of carpeting on the floor; half a dozen large flower pots, turned upside down, stood round for seats; a table which Alfred had made them stood in the centre, covered with its gay cloth; and little books in bright covers lay about in elegant disorder. In the middle of the table stood an old inkstand, now well washed and filled with flowers, which looked very pretty indeed. The walls were already adorned with large pictures from The Illustrated London News, which gave a very lively appearance to them. The children thought that they had never seen any thing so charming as this room; how they wished that they could live there always! They played that the family was going from home for a long time, so they drew down the Venetian blind that the furniture might not get faded.

While they were so busy playing at all this, they never thought about the parting which was to take place so soon.

Herbert's trunk and all his things had been sent off, and now he had had his dinner, and he and his mamma were going to walk to the school. Their mamma proposed that Meggy should go with them, for by this means she thought the parting would be easier. Their things were put on, and off they set as cheerfully as could be, neither Meggy nor Herbert seeming to trouble themselves about any thing. They were very merry, one on each side of their mamma, and talked about the things which they saw by the way, the gay carriages, and the horses, and the omnibuses, and it made Meggy very happy to see a little old man who sold green-groceries and little flower-roots. He was an old acquaintance of hers, and she always called him "her old man." He was shouting his green peas at sixpence a peck, when he cast his eyes round him and saw Meggy. She had seen him a little before, and had pulled at her mamma's hand, and had leaned forward to Herbert to make them both aware of the circumstance. The old man ceased to say any more about his peas, when he saw Meggy, and setting down his barrow in a minute, he took off his hat, and smiled with a very good-natured and happy look.

"Good day, my little lady," said he.

"How are you to-day, and how is your wife?" asked Meggy, as her mamma and Herbert both

stopped and spoke to him, and admired his nice little roots of pinks and pansies which he had to sell.

It was always very pleasant to Meggy to see this old man; she always felt that he was a friend of hers, and knew besides this that if it had not been for her, nobody in the house would have taken any notice of the poor old man. She always talked a deal about him when they met him any where, and now she told her mamma and Herbert that he was a very nice old man, and very sober, and that all the money he got by selling his vegetables and his flowers he took home to his old wife, who was a very nice old woman, only she was very, very short, quite a little dwarf, and that every Sunday they went to church together, and when there were flowers to be had, he always had a nice little bunch of something in his coat, and when there were no flowers, he had a little sprig of evergreen. The talk about the little old man and his little old wife brought them to the place where Herbert was to go to school.

There were several little boys already come; and one little fellow came to meet Herbert very kindly, and wanted to take him into the playground, where some of his future companions were amusing themselves. But Herbert did not wish to go; he held very firmly by his mamma's hand, and looked very grave.

The lady of the school spoke very kindly to him, and he knew that she was very kind and good, but some way or other he felt as if he could not talk. He stood beside his mamma as she sat on the sofa, and still grasped her hand. A strange feeling of the reality of going to school was now come over him: it was no longer a joke; he and Meggy were not playing at it, and it made him very serious; but still he was not sorry that he was going to school, nor had he any intention of crying, but he felt that it really was a serious business.

And now his mamma and Meggy rose to go. Meggy kissed him, but she did not cry, and Herbert kissed her. He still grasped his mamma's hand, and that so tightly, that it was almost painful to her; she looked in his face, and saw that he was very pale.

"Good-by, dear Herbert," said his mamma, kissing him, and disengaging her hand.

Herbert looked at her with his large blue eyes, without smiling, and with a very pale and grave countenance, but he said nothing. He was keeping back his tears: he did not mean to cry, and he knew that if he spoke he should.

He felt rather forlorn and rather afraid of the boys when his mamma and Meggy were gone: he looked at the boys at play through the window, but he did not wish to go to them. The lady of

the school gave him some pictures to look at; so he sat down and amused himself with them. He could not help thinking about his own happy home, and Meggy and the pretty house in the garden: but he did not shed one tear; and after he had once seen the faces of all the boys at tea, he allowed a little boy, who was just his own age, to persuade him to go out to play. Playing with so many boys, and most of them little ones like himself, he soon found to be very pleasant. Herbert was sure that he should be happy at school.

CHAP. XVII.

MEGGY SOLITARY, AND HER JOURNEY INTO THE COUNTRY.

MEGGY was very solitary without her brother. When she came back into her own home the whole sense of her solitude fell upon her. She saw Herbert's garden hat in the hall, and she could not help crying. Crying only made her feel more unhappy; she cried, and sobbed violently: the nursery was solitary, so was the garden; and as for the little pretty house, in which she had formerly enjoyed so much happiness, it seemed to her as if she could never again bear to go near it. Every body was very sorry for Meggy, but the more that was said to her, the more unhappy she felt; she could not help wishing that there were no schools for little boys to go to.

A few days after Herbert was gone, Ellen set off with Meggy into the country for several weeks. This was an excursion which had been talked of for a long time, but Meggy's mamma had deferred it till after Herbert was gone to school, because she knew that parting from him would be so great a trouble, and this pleasure would divert her mind from it.

Meggy was overjoyed to see all her things laid out ready, and then packed in a trunk. She took one of her dolls with her, and her work-box and the silver thimble which was not too little for her, although nobody expected she would find much time for sewing. She was going into quite a country place, where a little girl, whose parents lived in London, was also staying; so that she would have a companion of her own age to play with, and her mamma did not wish her to do any thing more than reading. They were going to stay at Ellen's parents, and this was in the very village where Meggy's father and mother had once lived, and where both Meggy and Herbert were born, although Meggy could remember nothing at all about it. She was very fond of Ellen, and the thought of going this journey with her was as pleasant as it could be.

The morning came on which they were to set off. Meggy had thought for a long time of this journey, and had fancied how it would be, but she had always fancied it on a fine, sunshiny morning, just such as one imagines summer mornings always are. But Meggy's fancies were wrong this time: it rained very hard. When people got up in the morning it rained; and the first word every body said was, "What a wet day for Meggy's and Ellen's journey!" Her mamma thought that they had

better put it off for a day or two, till the weather was finer. But this was an idea that neither Meggy nor Ellen liked at all, and besides, every body hoped it would be quite fine before noon. So, spite of the rain, they set off.

It rained when they reached London, and as they drove through it, nothing but wet streets and wet umbrellas were to be seen, and every thing looked damp and dreary; but neither Meggy nor Ellen were out of spirits with such a trifle as that: they were sure it would be fine enough long before they got into the country; and they did not mind about the weather any where else.

They went by railroad the rest of their journey, fourteen miles, into Surrey, to the pleasant neighbourhood of Claremont, where the Queen has her country house, and where she and her little children go for quietness and recreation, just as Meggy and Ellen were now doing, and that to a cottage not far from the park gates.

Meggy enjoyed skimming along in the railway carriage very much: it was not the first time she had made such a journey, but that did not signify. It was a great delight to her to arrive at the Vauxhall terminus, and see all the stir and bustle there was of people driving up in cabs and carriages, and omnibuses full of people and their luggage, and to see them hurrying to get their tickets, and to see

Ellen get hers, and then the porters running off with the luggage, and to feel herself and Ellen running on after it, and then to see people getting into the carriages, and to feel herself lifted in, and then see Ellen come in with such a smiling face, and hear her say, "Thank you, sir," to a civil gentleman who had told her it was all right about their boxes; and then to stand up at the window of the carriage, and watch all that was going on, till the second bell rang and the steam gave a scream and the train was put in motion, and off they went, at first rather slowly, and then very fast, till the road itself seemed like a long gravel-coloured ribbon drawn out, and the white posts at each quarter of a mile flashed past as if they stood close to one another; and then if they met another train, it was almost frightful as it came rushing past like a flash of dark lightning. Oh, it was delightful to stand at the window and watch it all! And what a many market gardens they passed after leaving London, and then pretty villas, and gentlemen's houses, and green sloping parks, and little villages, and fields where the hay was in cocks! And then there was Wandsworth and Wimbledon and Kingston stations, where some passengers got out and others came in. All this was very entertaining, and the only thing that she wanted to make her happiness complete was, that Herbert had been in the same carriage

with her to have enjoyed every thing as much as she did.

The prophecy about the rain clearing off before they got into the country proved false, for when they arrived at Ditton station, where they had to leave the railroad, it rained as fast, nay, it really seemed to rain faster than it had done all the morning before. Although it was July, the common at Ditton was standing with pools of water: the cocks and hens stood looking very forlornly patient on one leg under carts or hovels; and the very ducks and geese looked dabbled and discontented, as if they thought there had been quite rain enough for one day. But neither Ellen nor Meggy looked troubled, however the ducks and geese did, for no sooner were they out of the railroad carriage with all their boxes than up came Ellen's father, smiling and looking so pleased to see them, and he had a nice covered spring cart to take them to his house. Meggy was delighted: she smiled, and felt ready to jump for joy as she saw the boxes put in the spring cart, and saw how glad Ellen was to see her old father, who looked so merry and kind. The little spring cart seemed like a little room, and Meggy could not help thinking how nicely Herbert and she could have lived in it as they went merrily on over the wet common to Ellen's home.

CHAP. XVIII.

THE NEW HOUSE AND THE NEW FRIEND.

THE cottage where Ellen's parents lived was a very pleasant old-fashioned country cottage; it stood in a garden, part of which was full of flowers, and the rest was used as a kitchen-garden, and in it there grew a great many apple, and pear, and cherry trees; and there were strawberry beds, and raspberry bushes, and gooseberry and currant trees. But, plentiful as the fruit was, yet Meggy never gathered any herself, because Ellen's father sold his fruit; but as he was a very good-natured old man he used often to give her some of the very nicest that grew in it. There were two tall cypresses that rose up like dark green spires in front of the white cottage, and over its green porch was trained a beautiful honeysuckle, which was now full of flower, and which smelt very sweetly.

The cottage stood upon the edge of a village green, along which wound a good road. The green was nearly as smooth as a lawn, and at a distance, with here and there a fine old tree, it looked like a park. The cottagers who lived all round the green, in houses which were half-buried in trees,

kept many geese, and those fed on the common, and made it look very lively. Just by the gate which led into Ellen's father's garden there ran a little brook, which at this particular place spread out into a little pond; it was overhung with old willow trees, and looked very pretty, and here the geese came to swim and enjoy themselves in the water. Meggy was very much pleased with the cottage, and the green, and the geese, and the pond overhung with the old willow trees.

At the cottage, as we said before, there was also another little girl, who was come from London for country air. Her name was Louisa; she was a year younger than Meggy, and was a very nice little girl. Louisa had been several weeks at the cottage before Meggy came, so that she was able to show her every thing.

The day after that on which Meggy and Ellen arrived was very fine, and the hot July sun soon dried up all wet from the surface of the ground. They went into the garden and looked at the flowers and the fruit, and saw Ellen's father gather peas. There had been in the spring plenty of violets and primroses on the tall banks of the garden-hedge; now the little girls saw their wild, thick green leaves growing; and Meggy, who knew more about flowers and country things than little Louisa, had the pleasure of telling her which were

which, and of showing her the pretty little blue robin-run-in-the-hedge, and the wild hop which was beginning to send forth its long sprays above the top of the hedge. Meggy felt herself very happy; she had never been so happy before, since Herbert went to school.

At the back of the house there was a rather wild piece of ground; it was overgrown with grass, and was not at all cultivated: here the little girls were told that they might play; might do just what they pleased, for here they could do no mischief. At the end of this piece of ground, and just opposite the house, stood an old wooden barn; it was very old, and grey and yellow lichens grew upon its wooden walls, and house-leek, and beautiful masses of golden-flowered stone-crop upon its old roof. It had once been a cow-shed, but now it was only used to put fuel in, and pea-sticks, and garden tools; and here too the hens and the broods of chickens lodged, and within its roof lived the lovely white and blue pigeons which came flying down every morning to be fed with vetches, and which the little girls, to their great delight, were allowed to scatter on the ground for them. On one side lay the great kitchen garden, from which it was divided by a hawthorn hedge, which had at one time been kept closely cut, but now grew wild, and among which

ran the nasturtion, the honey-suckle, and the wild hop. On the side opposite to this was a lane which led to a village not far off: the lane was much lower than this piece of ground, and was divided from it also by an old hedge in which grew crab and wild plum-trees, and which was a perfect tangle of wild roses and brambles.

It was very interesting to the little girls to peep down into this lane, and see now and then a man, perhaps, driving a cow along it, or a woman in a red shawl with a basket or bundle, or a little child going along on an errand, perhaps a rosy-cheeked lad in a little smock frock, or two or three little children, hand in hand, going or coming from school. Meggy and Louisa were very fond of these peeps, and sometimes they said, "Cuckoo!" and then had the pleasure of seeing the face of whoever was going along turned up to look who was there. If it were a man or woman they were sure to run away, but if it were a child, they only shouted "Cuckoo," louder than ever, and nodded and smiled, and looked as happy as the bird itself.

This hedge, however, had something which belonged to it much more remarkable even than the lane, and that was an old wooden summer-house which seemed stuck right into it, just as if it had been a great, big nest. This summer-house had

once been painted green; but was now faded to a sort of sage-coloured drab, by time and weather. It was open to the front, and had a nice dry wooden floor. At the back, and overlooking the lane, were two little, tiny windows, each of one pane of glass, one of which, was now broken. There stood two old wooden chairs in the summer-house, and a block of wood, covered with carpeting, as a footstool. It was called "the smoking house," and Ellen said she could remember, when her grandfather was alive, that he used to smoke his pipe there every day. Nobody, however, smoked in it now, and as soon as Meggy saw it she thought how charmingly they could play at having a house there. Louisa had never been used to play at having a house, but she soon found it quite as delightful as Meggy and Herbert had done.

They swept out the house; they pretended that a very untidy person had lived there before them; they cleaned the one remaining window; they dusted the chairs and made all very neat and orderly. They hunted about and found many broken pieces of earthenware which they reared up for plates and dishes. There was a very little, old-fashioned, rusty fire-place in one corner, and this they filled with sticks and little bits of coal; they rolled up pieces of white paper and stuck them into the holes of empty cotton reels, and these were

candles in candlesticks; they brought in their dolls for children, and felt as if they were quite comfortably settled there. Meggy thought it was almost, if not quite, as nice as the house in the garden at home.

CHAP. XIX.

HOW MR. HERNSHAW'S DOG MUSCHY WAS INVITED TO DINNER.

Besides themselves, there lodged a gentleman at the cottage. He was a very good-natured man, and used often to speak very kindly to them when he met them in the garden or on the stairs. Sometimes he would open his parlour door and call them in, and then when they were in, he would take a key from his pocket and open a cupboard door and give them nice little round and heart-shaped cakes. He had a little dog; a little rough, queer-looking grey Scotch terrier called Muschy. Muschy was always running about and poking its nose into holes and corners, and smelling here and there. It never barked at the little girls, although it used to bark at almost every body else that came to the house. They often used to call Muschy into their house, and would have felt themselves delighted if he would but have stayed with them. But he was always figeting about ; he would not be still for a minute; they did not know at all how to manage with him.

One day they determined to play at having a dinner party. They invited their dolls to come,

and the dolls accepted the invitation; they invited Muschy, and Muschy very politely said that he would come. Their dinner was a capital one; they had cakes, and apples, and gooseberries, and currants, which they called fish and roast beef, and apple-pie, and gooseberry pudding: the dolls and they would enjoy all these very much, but there was Muschy to be provided for; he turned up his nose at cake, and as for apples, and gooseberries, and currants, he would not touch them, so they collected all the chicken bones which were left after dinner, and with these they thought they should make a *real* feast for Muschy.

They set out their dinner beautifully, and placed their dolls one on each side, and then fetched in Muschy. But he was unusually unruly that day; they wanted to make him sit tidily on his hind legs, as he did at his master's bidding, but all their efforts with him were in vain. As they were both of them very busy trying to bring him into order they heard all at once a frightful sound outside the summer-house as if somebody had climbed up the bank from the lane. They looked one at the other and then glanced at the little broken window, and there, without a doubt, was *something*. Muschy sprang up and overturned the dinner-table, barking and whining as if he were out of his senses. Meggy and Louisa ran out screaming; they were terrified,

but they knew not at what; they fancied it was a man with a hat on, but why that should have frightened them so they could not tell. They both of them, however, had heard a voice which said, "I see you!" and the voice had seemed loud and gruff. Who could it be? and what could it mean?

Muschy was gone after the intruder — what a good little dog!. They were more inclined than ever to give him a dinner; they stole softly to the hedge, and peeped cautiously down into the lane; but there was nothing frightful to be seen there — nothing but their good fellow-lodger Mr. Hernshaw, who was walking quietly along, and Muschy was trotting on before him.

"Oh, Mr. Hernshaw!" they exclaimed, "there has been such a horrid man here, and he peeped through the window and said, I SEE YOU!"

"So Muschy has told me," said he, looking very good natured, and with that he walked on.

They neither of them knew exactly how Muschy could have told him, but they did not ask any questions, and the little dog seemed to them more worthy of a dinner than ever.

By this time their terror was all gone, and they returned into the summer house to re-arrange their dinner. Muschy was no where to be found, and as Mr. Hernshaw had not returned to the house,

they concluded that the dog was with him. Neither he nor his master came back by tea-time; and it did not seem as if they would come back before dark. They determined however not to eat their dinner without Muschy, so before they went to bed, they turned a large washing tub over their feast, and left all, as they thought, quite safe.

The next day, when they got up, they found that it was washing day at the cottage, and what was their surprise, on going to the summer-house, to find the tub carried away; all their dinner demolished; the gooseberries and currants smashed; the apples rolled away; the cakes gnawed and dirty, and the chicken bones vanished—every one! Could the man who had looked in at the broken window have been there again?

Whilst they were thus wondering, who should come bounding in but Muschy, wagging his tail, and looking in such a good humour that no one could have doubted about his smiling; he frisked round the summer-house, caught up an apple between his paws and rolled it along the floor; snapped at a cake but did not eat it, and jumped up and snuffed here and there about the floor.

"Muschy has been here and has had his dinner without us!" exclaimed Meggy. "Now hav'n't you, Muschy?"

Muschy barked and capered about and smiled, and that was all the answer he gave.

He had made an end of their dinner as well as his own, but they quite forgave him; and if he would only have stayed with them that morning they would have gladly given him a share of their breakfasts, but he was off with his master into the pleasant fir woods.

CHAP. XX.

MEGGY IN THE QUEEN'S GARDEN.

One day Ellen took Meggy to Claremont; it was on a day when little Louisa was gone to see her mamma in London, and so they went by themselves. Meggy was very much interested about the Queen and her little children; she often used to wonder whether the little princes and princesses played at living in a house as she and Herbert did; she wondered whether they used broken earthenware for plates and dishes, and whether they had ever made such a thing as a wet sand pudding.

The walk to Claremont was very pleasant; the sun shone through the branches of the large trees in the park; the grass was soft and green; they stood under the trees, and it seemed as if they were within a green tent; they heard the wood-pigeons cooing around them, and saw a little squirrel springing from one branch to another. Meggy had never before seen a squirrel in the open air, and it was a far prettier sight than she had imagined. It did not seem at all frightened; it sat on the great branch just above them, and with its bushy tale turned over its back, it looked down

at them with its lively black eyes; it then whisked its tail and leapt to another branch with such speed, that for a moment Meggy's eye could not follow it. She thought that it certainly must have wings.

Meggy had heard stories read of kings and princes who lived, "once upon a time," in enchanted palaces in the midst of old woods, and now, when they ascended the Mount with its old fir woods, lying so quietly in the sunshine, and the old grey tower at the top, she felt as if all this must indeed belong to a fairy tale. They walked on and on, as it seemed, a long way from the house; now they came to beautiful gardens and a conservatory and a lovely Gothic temple, which rose up silently and gracefully in the clear sunshine. She looked through the conservatory windows and saw palm-trees and beautiful tropical plants with their gorgeous flowers, all as still as in a dream. She never thought it possible that she could go into the conservatory, and yet she felt some way as if she *were* in, and was looking up all among the tops of the broad-leaved and feathery palms, and it was just like being in an enchanted land.

Again, they went on and on; the path became much narrower and more shady; tall laurels, full of their bright green foliage, rose on each side of the path; they descended into a dusk and damp

region: here were caves in the rock, and a hermitage. It seemed so solemn, and yet so pleasant! There was a sound of trickling waters somewhere about, but where they could not see, and beautiful large ferns, and graceful harts' tongue hung wavering in the soft breeze, in their clear green light, from a back-ground of dark-brown mosses and moss-covered stones. It was delightful. Meggy said very little, but she enjoyed it very much. They seemed now to be within the very heart of the wood, and here and there they came to vast beds of rhododendron, which crept along the dry ground, and now, late as it was in the season, were all one blaze of flowers. How lovely it was!

Meggy thought of her mamma and her sister, and of Herbert, and wished that they were all there. Presently they came to a piece of water. Meggy thought it was a large lake. They sat down on the smooth grass, which grew down to its edge, and could not help feeling the deep silence which was round them. The sunshine lay bright upon the water; not a breeze stirred; it was like a sheet of pure glass. Neither Meggy nor Ellen were in a humour for talking — they sat quite still, and noticed every thing. As they thus sat, looking into the clear, bright water, a long water-snake, with silvery scales, which reflected beautiful colours, like mother-of-pearl, glid along the margin

of the lake, and then rose to the surface, with its crested head, which it raised out of the water, and seemed to look round it. It became in a moment aware of their presence, darted down again into the transparent water, which circled into innumerable little eddies, and, with a sportive kind of movement, was out of sight in an instant. The surprise, the delight of so unexpectedly seeing such an object, seemed almost to take Meggy's breath. How strange it was! and yet, to her mind, it was only like a piece of the fairy-tale, which the whole excursion seemed to her to be.

She wondered whether Queen Victoria had ever seen the water-snake; and whether, as she had heard read in fairy tales, it ever came to the surface of the water with a starry crown on its head, and talked with the little princes and princesses.

Meggy often thought about their visit to Claremont. To her imagination it was all like a beautiful enchanted region; it was just the place for little princes and princesses to live in.

CHAP. XXI.

A CHAPTER WITH A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE, AND AN END.

MEGGY was six weeks at the cottage in the country. She saw many things while she was there; she saw the hay carried, the sheep shorn, and the corn cut and piled up into shocks in the field.

Just behind the cottage there was a large cornfield, and Meggy and Louisa were permitted to go into it by themselves, for here there was no danger. One day Meggy went into the field by herself; there was only one man reaping, and as he looked very good-natured, she ventured to go to the place where he was at work. Meggy had been gathering flowers from among the cut corn; she had a nosegay in her hand, of red poppies and yellow ragwort, and white corn marygolds, and she wanted now to find some scarlet pimpernel, which, as she knew, from having found it there before, was plentiful among the roots of the corn.

The reaper smiled, and she smiled, and then she stood and watched him at his work. He cut a great armful of corn, and then, before he bound it up

into a sheaf, he turned round and looked her full in the face, and smiled more kindly than ever.

"I know what your name is, little lady," said he.

"Do you?" asked Meggy, astonished at his words, for she had never heard *his* name.

"Yes," said he; "I used to work for your papa when he lived in these parts, about six years ago. Your papa was a very clever gentleman, every body knows that, and your mamma was the best lady that ever lived."

Meggy's face was as crimson as a rose; her eyes looked larger and brighter than ever; she smiled, quite delighted, and felt very friendly with the man who thus praised her parents.

"Yes, to be sure," continued the man, who could plainly see, by her countenance, how pleased she was, "I have reason to speak well of your papa and mamma, miss! and then your little brother, Master Herbert, what a handsome, fat baby he was, and what a nice young woman he had for his nurse!"

Meggy knew not what to say, but the man had risen many degrees higher in her esteem, because he admired her dear brother Herbert, when he was a fat little baby.

"And he is a handsome young gentleman now, I'll be bound for it," said he; "that he is, if he is any thing like you, miss."

Meggy's tongue had been loosed at the commencement of this last sentence, and she was just going to tell all about her brother, when the man added the last words, and she again was silent. She was very much pleased, but someway she felt a little uncomfortable; altogether she had been taken by surprise, and yet she was quite inclined to think well of any one who spoke so well of her parents, and who thought Herbert must be handsome, and who led her to understand that he considered her so too! She blushed again and smiled, and began to pull at a great piece of yellow ragwort, which grew before her, and which had such a tough stem that it would not break.

"Let me get it for you, my little lady," said the man, and readily broke it off for her.

"Thank you," said Meggy, now speaking readily, "thank you, you are very kind."

"Are you fond of flowers?" asked he.

"Yes, that I am," replied she; and spying a little way off the very flower she wanted, the little scarlet pimpernel, she sprang forward and gathered it.

The man stood looking at her, and smiling.

"Are you not tired with working so hard all day long this hot weather?" asked she.

"Yes, miss," returned he, "I often am pretty well tired before my work is done, but poor folks

mustn't mind that; and this hot weather makes one thirsty, very thirsty, miss."

"Shall I go and fetch you something to drink?" asked Meggy full of benevolence, and delighted with an opportunity of obliging a person who had expressed such friendly sentiments towards her family; "they have plenty of beer at the cottage, shall I go and fetch you some?"

"Thank you, my dear little lady," said the man, thank you a thousand times; I *should* like a drop of beer."

Meggy ran off at full speed, resolved to carry back to the man a nice jug of fresh drawn beer. It never entered her head at the moment of offering it that there was the slightest possibility of her not as readily getting it. When she reached the house, however, a feeling of uncertainty stole over her, and yet she could not at all tell whether what she was doing was foolish or wrong.

Ellen's mother and sister were sitting in the little parlour at their sewing when she entered. Meggy very modestly made her request — would they please to send the man in the cornfield a jug of beer?

The two uttered an exclamation — "Oh no! the man was not working for them: what could put such an idea into her head? Had he sent her to ask for it?"

Such were the outcries and questions that met her request. Meggy cast down her eyes, and was ashamed and perplexed. She did not know what to do: was it wrong then, she thought to herself, to offer the man any beer? But then she had promised it to him; he would think it so very unkind of her. She wished, with all her heart, that she had some beer of her own to give him. She was just ready to cry, when she saw, how they all laughed at the idea of sending out beer to a man whom they did not know, and who was working for somebody else; but for all that she felt desperate, and said, "But he would expect the beer, for she had promised to fetch it for him: he was a very good man," she said, "and he was thirsty, and she offered to fetch him beer, and he was very much obliged to her: she really *must* have some beer for him."

They told her that he was very likely some drunken, good-for-nothing man, who had been making fun of her; and they were sure he would not expect the beer; at all events, if he did, he would not get any.

That the man should have been making fun of her, she could not believe; the idea distressed her. It was altogether a very uncomfortable affair, and she stole quietly out of the room into the little old summer-house, thinking, with a feeling of mortifi-

cation, that she should never like to face the
nor again go into the cornfield, which had hit
been such a favourite place of hers.

In the evening she still sat in the old sum
house quite alone, for it was one of those day
which little Louisa was gone to see her mot
when she was startled by hearing some voices a
coming through the house, and in the direction
the place where she sat. She knew the voice o
too well; it was that of the man who had be
reaping, and Ellen's father was with him.

"There she is, the little dear," said Ellen
father, pointing into the summer-house.

She felt as if she hardly dared to look up; wha
could he be come about? could it be about th
beer? Her little heart was all in a flutter of terror
and she was just thinking of running away, and
hiding herself, when Ellen ran up to her laughing,
and turned her round by main force.

The man was smiling, just as good naturedly as
ever; he had a beautiful bunch of flowers in his
hand; there were white lilies, and cabbage roses,
and gillyflowers. It was very beautiful.

"I have brought these out of my own garden
for little miss," said he, presenting them, "if she
will please to accept them."

Meggy, without knowing why, felt just ready to

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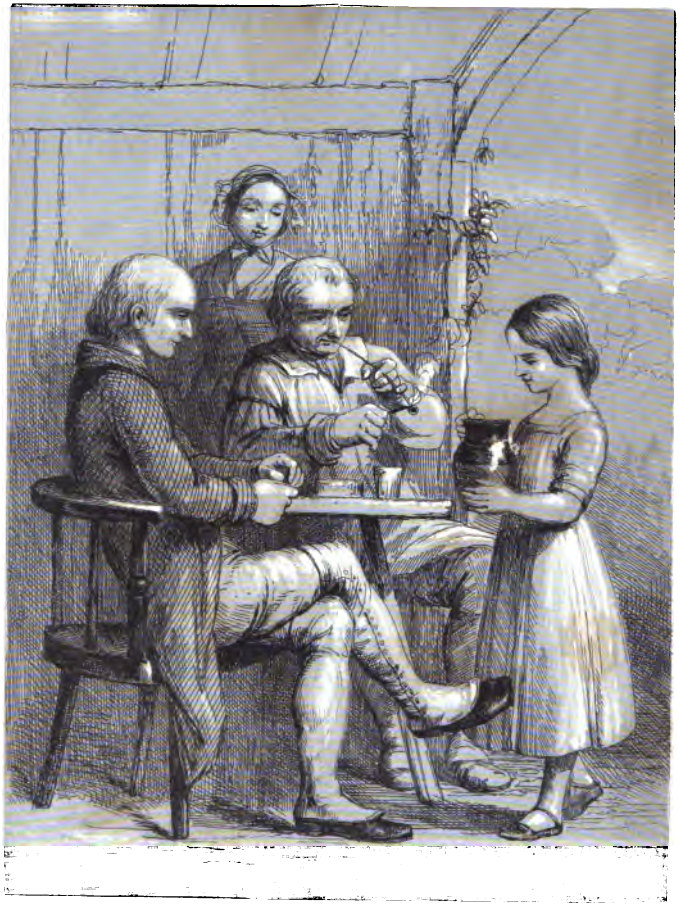


MEGGY BRINGING ALE FOR JOE JINKS.

cry; she clung to Ellen with one hand, and took the flowers with the other.

"You said you were fond of flowers, little miss," said he, "and I have great pleasure in giving you these — my garden lies nicely to the sun," said he, addressing Ellen's father.

"Fetch out a couple of pipes, a jug of ale, and a couple of glasses," said Ellen's father, "Neighbour Jinks will maybe smoke a pipe with me."

He seated himself on one of the old wooden chairs in the summer-house and told the man to take the other. Meggy ran and helped to bring in the pipes, and the ale, and the glasses, and then somebody brought in a little round stand and set the things upon it; and in a very short time Meggy had great pleasure in seeing the circling smoke of the tobacco floating round the summer-house, and a glass of foaming ale set before the good man. It was a beautiful sight to her, and, for the first time in her life, she thought the fumes of tobacco not unpleasant.

"I am glad he has the ale," said Meggy to Ellen.

"Who could ever have thought that it was good old Job Jinks that was reaping in the field?" said Ellen's mother; "yes, I am glad he has the ale, and if I had known it had been he, he should have had the beer and welcome."

Meggy was made quite happy; she did not at

all know *who* Job Jinks was, or why he deserved to be so much esteemed, but she was very glad that she had not made any great mistake in feeling kindly disposed to the man who had praised her dear little brother, and spoken so handsomely of her parents.

CHAP. XXII.

THE CHILDREN MEET AND ARE HAPPY. WHAT HERBERT TOLD ABOUT GOG AND MAGOG.

And now the time was come for Meggy and Ellen to leave the pleasant country cottage and return to London. Meggy had seen many new things in the country, and besides this, she had enjoyed herself with little Louisa very much, but still she was now quite willing to go back to her own dear house, where although she could not have Herbert every day, she at least should see him every Sunday, and was not that a great happiness?

The day after Meggy's return Herbert was allowed to come home from school, although it was not Sunday, to see her. Nothing could be a greater happiness than their meeting: they kissed one another over and over again; they walked hand in hand in the garden; they talked of all that had happened since they parted. Meggy had to relate all her adventures and pleasures in the country, and Herbert had to tell of various interesting events which had happened to him. Among other things, his brother Alfred had taken him twice to London: they had gone together in an omnibus, and

this he had found very amusing: the first time, they went to see Gog and Magog in Guildhall, to see the inside of the Exchange, and go through St. Paul's. Herbert thought Gog and Magog very wonderful. There was a gentleman in Guildhall, quite a stranger to them, who came up and began talking to them; he seemed a very merry man, for he laughed a great deal, and would insist upon it that they were real giants, and that in the daytime they pretended to be wood and paint, and stood there with their big faces staring out stupidly at every thing; but he said it was all make-believe, for they could hear and see just as well as we could; and then he made a great start and said, Oh, did they not see the eyes of one of them move? and that it was plain enough he was laughing all the time. One giant, he said, was very deaf and the other near-sighted, and no wonder, for they were very old: he believed many hundred years old, and the only wonder was that they had lived so long. He said that at night, as soon as ever the giants heard St. Paul's strike twelve and all London was gone to sleep, they two came down, and the one that could hear told the one that was deaf every thing that people had been saying in the day; and the one that had good eyes told him that was near-sighted all that he had seen, and so they were very useful to each other. The gentleman said,

that the giants were brothers, and were very fond of one another, and never had quarrelled but once in all their lives, and that was about a Lord Mayor's knee-buckle. He said that the Lord Mayor and all the corporation had been at dinner, and when they were gone and the two giants were come down to look about them, as they always did, one of them saw something on the floor. A moon-beam that shone in through one of the windows fell directly upon this something, and made it look very bright. The giant that saw it first was very ill at that time with the lumbago, which he had got from a broken pane in the side of the window nearest to his corner, and which made him so stiff in the back that he could not stoop to pick it up. So he called to his brother, and pointed it out to him with the end of his great staff, and the other giant picked it up and took it to a window and examined it by the moonlight, and when he saw what it was he put it in his pocket, for he thought it was something made of beautiful glazed sugar, and he meant to keep it all to himself. "What is it?" asked the other giant. "It's a glow-worm," replied his brother, "and it has burnt my fingers."

"It can't be a glow-worm," returned the first giant, "because there is no grass near it."

"It's a piece of glass, then," said the other, de-

termined to deceive him, " for I heard it jingle as I dropt it again."

With that the lumbago-giant began to poke about his brother's feet with his staff, for he could not stoop, and the other took the opportunity of tasting a bit of the buckle, which he thought was sugar. But it was all glittering diamonds, and it flashed out such a blaze of light as made the other look up in a hurry. He saw it, and he saw what his brother was about. He thought, too, that it was beautiful rock sugar, and as he had not tasted any for hundreds of years, he was just as eager to have a bit as the other. With that they began snatching and trying who should have it, and in the scuffle the diamond buckle fell down into a crack in the floor, and there it lies to this day. The two giants, however, who by this time were quite in a rage with one another, believed each that the other had the prize, and this made them all the more furious. It was all that ever they could do to scramble up to their pedestals before daylight; and you may fancy what a commotion there was in all London next morning, when their torn jerkins and torn wigs and bruised faces were seen. It was a long time before they were quite well; but the city of London bought them new jerkins and new wigs, and the king's barber trimmed their beards for them, and they promised ever after to

live peaceably together, and so they have done; and every night as I told you when all the world is gone to bed, the moment they hear the last stroke of twelve on St. Paul's clock, they come down and walk up and down arm in arm as lovingly as can be. That is the story of Gog and Magog.

CHAP. XXIII.

MORE THAT HERBERT TOLD.

HERBERT was delighted to tell it to Meggy: he did not believe a word of it himself, but it was very funny, he said, and while the gentleman was telling it to him and Alfred, he felt as if it were true, and he wished them to go at night, and see the two old giants walking up and down.

From Guildhall they went to St. Paul's, and Herbert described the great inside of the cathedral with its huge organ; its many monuments, and the echoing sound produced by the closing of a door, and which to him seemed like the roaring of a lion. And then there was the going up and up and up to the Whispering Gallery, and the still going higher and higher to the outside gallery, where there was such a wind as almost lifted them off their feet, and from which they had such a grand view over all London.

That was one day's excursion; and then another day Alfred had taken him to the Pantheon, and showed him all the beautiful things there, and he had to describe the pyramids of dolls that there were, and dolls' houses and palaces, and dolls in

beautiful cradles, and some as big as real babies, and some like the Queen and Prince Albert and all their children. It was wonderful, Herbert said, and he wished Meggy could have seen them. And then there were all kinds of toys, and guns and whips, and little carriages and horses, and every thing! And such caps and bonnets, and books, and baskets, and flowers, and vases, and china! and you went up stairs and walked round a gallery, and saw more things and more things, and looked down and saw all the beautiful things that you had seen before, and it looked quite like something in a grand picture. And then they went to a place where nothing but confectionary was sold; and Alfred said, Now he should have something good — what would he like? He looked all round, and every thing seemed so nice, and he did not know what he should choose, and then Alfred said, He should have some buns and an ice! He had never eaten an ice before, and it was so good! he only wished Meggy could taste it; he did think, whether he could not save her a bit, but then ice all melts away, and so he ate it and his buns, and they sat and talked; and Alfred was so good tempered, and seemed to think nothing any trouble, and therefore he asked him questions about every thing, and he answered him, and never once said, "Don't bother me so!" or any thing of

that sort; and then last of all, they went into such a beautiful conservatory, where there was a fountain playing, and such lovely flowers all in bloom, and such beautiful birds, parrots and macaws, and love-birds, all in cages or on poles, and the fountain splashed, and the birds sung and chattered, and the flowers sent forth such a delicious scent, and Herbert thought it was the most charming place in all London. This was what he had to tell her of the greatest pleasures which he had enjoyed during her absence; and as he described it all to her, it settled down into her mind in such vivid and clear colouring, that she almost felt as if she too had seen it all herself.

Besides talking, Herbert and Meggy had a deal of work to do. They again set their house in order, for it, of necessity, began to look neglected after having been uninhabited for so many weeks. They pulled up the weeds also from their gardens, and filled their joint kitchen-garden with lettuces and celery. They did in a short time a great deal of work, and all the while Herbert had to tell Meggy about his school-life. How very happy he was, and that he did not find his lessons at all hard, and that he liked his school-fellows, Walter and Edwin, very much. Walter, while Meggy was away, had been once at home with him, and they two had lived in the house, and had made a feast of lettuces, and

bread and butter, which his mamma had given them, and there never was any thing so good as those lettuces: they had gathered them quite fresh in the garden, and then washed them at the garden-tubs, and had eaten them in their little house with bread and butter and salt! Their papa, also, had given them some apples and grapes. Had they not had a feast! They had gone with their papa and gathered the apples, and gone with him to cut the grapes, and they laid them on vine leaves for dishes, and they sat round the little table and were so happy! Herbert had showed Walter the holes where the mason-bees had laid their eggs, and the underground regions inhabited by the ants; and Walter had said, many a time since then, that he would rather go home with Herbert, than go any where else in the world.

Meggy, in return, had to tell her brother about her six weeks' sojourn in the country, about the pretty green lanes that they had walked in, and the old quiet fir-woods where there hardly grew a blade of grass, and where every thing looked so dry and brown, and still, as if it was all in a dream; and she had to tell about her little companion Louisa, and the queer little, fidgety dog Muschy, and the three cats, Beauty, Granny, and Jack, and about the beautiful pigeons that had such a dainty way with them, and that used to fly down in the

morning to be fed with peas and tares, and then used to go and drink with their delicate little beaks at the stone trough so prettily. While Meggy told Herbert all this he almost wished he had been with her.

That was a happy day which the two dear children spent together. In the evening Herbert was to return to school, but what could equal the joy of the little ones when their sister Mary said, that if their parents would consent, she would take them both the next day to the Zoological Gardens, and thus Herbert should not only stay at home all night, but spend a second happy day with his little sister.

Alfred volunteered to walk down to the school to explain his absence, and the whole thing was at once decided upon.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE CHILDREN HAVE A GREAT PLEASURE, BUT HERBERT LOOKS IN VAIN FOR A SUN-BEAR.

MARTHA, one of the maids, was to go with them, and the next morning, which was as fine as any body could wish for a day of pleasure, they set off. Martha had never been to the Zoological Gardens, so Herbert had a great deal to do before they arrived at the place, in explaining to her what she had to see. He told her, that long and long before she got to the gardens, miles off almost, she would hear the wild beasts roaring. He was a very little boy, when he was there before, and he imagined all this. As they walked through the Regent's Park, he was in a great state of excitement, listening for the roar of the lion; and every now and then stopped, and was sure it must be heard. Meggy had never been there any more than Martha, and she of course was filled with the most intense expectation. At last they were within sight of the Gardens, and then, all at once, the sound, so long listened for, was heard. The lion *did* roar, and immediately afterwards something yelled — it must have been the hyena; and then a

wild ass sent forth a discordant, trumpeting cry, and the lion roared again, and Herbert was delighted beyond measure. Meggy clung to her sister in terror, and Herbert laughed and put his arm round her, and stood like a champion; and said, in his fondest voice, "Don't be afraid, Hexey, no wild beast can get loose, and they are only glad that we are come, that's all."

To Herbert's great joy, Martha declared, "That though they had not heard it 'miles off,' yet that it was a deal grander than she expected, and that the lion must be a terrible beast to have such a voice."

Though Herbert had been such a little boy when he had been there before, yet he seemed to remember so much about the Gardens, that his sister Mary said, that he should guide them, he should take them just where he liked; and that made him very happy.

One thing, however, quite troubled him. His sister Mary had told him about the great sun-bear which she had seen when she was there last, how big and silly and melancholy it looked, and about its pale sea-green eyes. Herbert had not seen the sun bear; he had not even read about it; but the idea of it as his sister described it, in its shaggy coat, which looked like a rough blanket, the colour of a London fog, and its pale sea-green eyes, made a great impression upon his mind. He

was most anxious to see the sun-bear. His sister said she would show it to him, but when they reached the den of the sun-bear it was no longer there; another animal, quite a different one, was living in it. Herbert grew perfectly anxious; was the sun-bear ill, or dead, or had it merely changed its lodgings. His sister encouraged him with the hope that they might yet see it. They went on; they saw the lion who had roared so grandly, and the tigers, and all their relations, the leopards, and panthers, and cougars, and cat-a-mountains; and then they saw the brown bears, and fed them with buns, and saw them climb up the poles, and then come down again, and all this was very amusing; but still they did not see the sun-bear!

They found great amusement among the monkeys, some of whom cracked nuts; others swung and leapt about and played all sorts of pranks, but most of all were they delighted with an old grave mother monkey nursing her little child. She was so odd and looked so serious, the only wonder was, that she did not burst out a laughing; and then, after she had tossed about, and hugged and cuffed her little one, she made it cling to her neck with its funny little black arms, and she began capering and frisking and flinging herself, as it were, from one side of the cage to the other; and all the time the little baby monkey clung to her neck, and

looked as if he were glued to her. They saw the eagles, and all those noble birds, standing with grave and intelligent countenances on their perches, and looking round them as if they were making their own remarks on all those who came to see them. They saw the parrots, and heard their loud chattering till they were almost deafened by it; and the funny little merry lively rattel that lives next door to the sloth, and amuses itself all day long by running to one corner and turning head over heels, and to another corner and doing the same, and then to the front and performing the same little feat. The only wonder was, that it did not get completely tired.

Herbert looked in vain for the sun-bear; it was neither near the elephants nor the wild asses, nor the cameleopards. They rode on one elephant's back, and threw buns into the great open mouth of another; they saw the great hippopotamus go down to the water, and they felt as if they never should be tired of looking at the beautiful cameleopards, with their graceful movements, and their mild, affectionate eyes. There were some odd-looking, old-fashioned Syrian goats, with long flapping ears, which Herbert was delighted to recognise from plates of them, which he had seen in Calmet's "Dictionary of the Bible." Yes, it was all delightful, if they could only have found the sun-bear. Herbert ran hither and thither; peeped

into the most unlikely, as well as likely, places; but no where could see the pale sea-green eyes, and the shaggy fog-coloured coat of the huge old sun-bear. He began to think, that, after all, he should not see it: they came back to the very point where they had entered; they made many inquiries, but nobody could assist them: some said they had seen it that very day, others, that they had not, they only wished they had; some said it was somewhere about, and others that it was nowhere, and that there never had been a sun-bear in the Gardens. But that was all a mistake; Mary knew better than that, for she had seen it. They turned down all sorts of winding walks, and came to the seal, who to their great joy lay basking beside his water, and to the beavers, who came out as if to be looked at—they could see every thing, excepting the sun-bear!

It was now time to go home; they stood beside the iron gate of exit, which once passed admits of no return; what were they to do? Herbert was almost ready to cry; he said he cared for nothing but the sun-bear, neither lions nor tigers nor any thing, and it was such a shame not to have seen it! The only consolation he could find was in his sister's words, that some day or other they should come again, and then if the sun-bear were in the Gardens they *would* find him out.

CHAP. XXV.

A VERY SHORT CHAPTER WHICH, HOWEVER, CONTAINS SOMETHING.

EVERY body remarked that Herbert had a bad cough, and it seemed worse even on the second day than the first: they said he must have something for his cough, and they wondered how he could have got it, because the weather was so dry and pleasant.

A day or two afterwards news came from school that Herbert had the hooping-cough; and by this time Meggy also had begun — she had taken the cough from her brother. This was a strange and unlooked for event, and Meggy, though feeling pretty well herself, was full of sorrow and compassion for Herbert; she feared so much that he would be ill. Herbert, on his part, was only concerned about his sister, who he knew was not nearly as strong as he was; he feared so much that she might be ill. Every thing, however, has its consolation, and the best consolation to the children was, that the cough was not very bad, and as they both had it, they could be always together.

CHAP. XXVI.

A LONG CHAPTER, AND ALL ABOUT LITTLE HARRY TWIGGS. A CHAPTER FOR A HOT DAY.

One Sunday it was excessively hot; so hot that the children did not know what to do. The heat and their coughs together made them very fretful; if they sat in the house they were hot; if they went out they were almost melted. In the evening they sat at tea with the windows open, flowers on the table, and the butter almost like oil though it was in water. Nobody ate or drank much, indeed to drink hot tea was out of the question. Herbert was almost cross, and so was Meggy; they wished they had ice to put in their tea; they said that the Chinese were a deal wiser than the English, because they drank their tea cold; and that they did not believe any body in all the world was as hot as they had been all day.

Their father said what would they think if they were little Harry Twiggs?

They had never heard of little Harry Twiggs, and they asked who he was. Their papa said that

at five o'clock that very morning, little Harry Twiggs went out with a wooden clapper in his hand to frighten away the birds from Farmer Broadbent's corn. This corn grew in a thirty-acre field — a monstrous field; the whole parish called it "the big field," and it was full of corn, beautiful corn, just getting ripe; and the birds, great and small, came from far and near to peck it. Farmer Broadbent meant that that one field should pay the rent of his whole farm. He was very particular about having the birds kept out, so he hired little Harry Twiggs, who was one of the poorest boys in all the parish, at threepence a day, to walk round and round the corn field, and down the foot-road that went across it from end to end, to make a noise with his little wooden clapper, and to shout with his weak voice, and thus to frighten away the birds. For the last six days, from Monday till Saturday little Harry had done so; he went at five o'clock in the morning, and came away at eight o'clock at night, and all day long he saw nobody unless by chance any body went along the foot-road when he was on it, for otherwise he was so little, and the corn was so tall, that he could not have seen them; and in all that long week he had only seen a beggar, and he was deaf and dumb, and so could not talk to him, and the parish constable, of whom he was always afraid, because when he saw

him he thought of the round-house which was the parish prison.

All round the field there were tall hedges full of wild roses and honey suckles, and meadow-sweet, and pretty purple vetches, which made them very delightful, only that poor Harry soon grew tired of looking at them by himself. In the hedges there also grew, here and there, tall old oak trees, which cast, one or other of them, all day long, a pleasant shade; and Harry used to think that if he could but lie down under the shady trees it would be pleasant, but then he was so afraid of Farmer Broadbent coming into the field when he should be lying there, and perhaps fast asleep, for the hot sun and weariness often made him sleepy. He therefore never dared to indulge himself; and all day long he went round and round, and up and down that great, wide, corn field, on which the sun shone without any shadow, unless it might be a passing cloud. Poor Harry often was so tired that he did not know what to do, and he was always glad when, by the height of the sun, he thought it was noon, and then he might sit down and eat his dinner, his little dinner of bread and cheese and buttermilk. Sometimes he made a mistake and ate it an hour too soon — he never took it an hour too late — and then the afternoon seemed so long that he thought it never would end;

and he often, besides that, was ready to cry because he was so hot and tired, and had nobody to speak to — not even a dog.

Harry lived with his old grandmother: they lived by themselves in a little mud cottage, one story high, beside the common, and Harry used to play with all the neighbours' children, for they were none of them too grand to play with a poor little lad like him. There was Dick Tattersall — he was Harry's favourite playfellow, and the son of the blacksmith, a stout lad, who would have made two of such little fellows as Harry Twiggs, though he was not quite half a year older; and then there were all Dick's brothers and sisters — such a flock of them! who always came trooping at his heels, because he was such a funny, good-natured fellow, and was always so kind to them, and there was Peggy Ford, Widow Ford's little daughter, who lived in the least house in all the parish — less even than the Twiggs's, for the Fords, like them, were very poor — and she used to play with Dick Tattersall's sisters, and that made her very friendly also with Harry and Dick.

Poor little Harry often told his friends in the evening, when he got home and found them all playing, and he was too tired to play, how solitary and forlorn he felt in "the big field" all by himself from morning till night. One evening when Harry

had been talking in this way, Dick said, "As sure as he was alive he would go and keep him company in the big field all next Sunday;" and Peggy Ford said, "So would she, if Nancy Tattersall would;" and Nancy said, "She would, if little Joshua might go," and every body said little Joshua might, and so it was all agreed and settled, and Harry wished it was Sunday.

On Sunday morning — this very Sunday morning, said the children's papa — while you were fast asleep in bed, up got little Harry as usual, put on his clean shirt, stockings he had none, and his good pair of trousers — his common ones were very old indeed — and his Sunday jacket, which was but an old one after all, and off he set as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast, with his dinner in an oldish, grey-looking basket. It was a capital dinner that he had that day; a little bit of cold mutton, a huge hunch of bread, some treacle in an old tea cup with a tea-pot lid that fitted it, and this with bread was to be the grand second course. Besides this, he had a little can of buttermilk. It was a particularly good dinner, and Harry meant to divide it amongst his friends if it were better than what they brought.

He hoped as he passed the blacksmith's to see some of the family about, perhaps even Dick himself. But no! it was all shut up, shop and all;

for they were taking their rest an hour or two later, as it was Sunday morning. He then turned down the lane towards the little house where Widow Ford lived; but the door was shut, and the white cotton curtain drawn in the window, and no signs of life were visible about the place, excepting the old greyish tortoiseshell cat which had been shut out all night. As soon as the cat saw Harry, she heaved up her back and tail, and rubbed in a sidling way against the door-post, and mewed with a long whining mew.

"Poor pussy!" said Harry, and stroked her, and wished he could only leave a message with her; but it was no use wishing that, so he stroked her again, and called her "poor pussy!" in rather a louder voice, that they might hear him if they were awake, for he knew where their bed stood. But they must have been fast asleep, for though he waited five minutes and talked a great deal to the cat, they never heard him; and as the curtain did not move, he thought it could be no use staying, so he went on slowly, looking back every now and then to see if any body by chance peeped out, but nobody did. There was nothing then to be done but to trudge off to the field as fast as he could, for he now heard the church clock strike a quarter to six, and he was frightened lest Farmer Broadbent should take a walk into the field, as he

often did before breakfast, and not find him there. He was afraid of Farmer Broadbent, partly because he was such a large man, and had such a large voice, and walked with such a large stick; and partly because he was overseer of the poor, and often sent poor folks to the union workhouse, the bastile as they called it, and that was enough to make him afraid. So whenever he saw the farmer in the field, he contrived to be a good way off, always clapping industriously and shouting to the birds; and the farmer who was very fat, and not at all nimble, could not follow after him, and thus Harry contrived to keep quite out of his way.

The first thing Harry did when he got into the field was to walk all round it, clapping as he went, though he never once thought about the birds, because he was thinking of the party he was going to have, and he wanted now to find out which was the pleasantest place in all the field. To be sure he had fixed that in his mind some days ago, even before he knew that his friends would come to visit him, but he now wanted to be quite sure about it. The nicest place in all the field was that on which he had before decided, and he now felt sure that it was the sweetest spot in all the parish.

It was in an old overgrown marl pit which separated this field from the next, and where there was no regular fence, but a great many oaks and

ashes, and plenty of hazel bushes, which formed a close and cool thicket, where at any time of the day they were sure of shade. There were something like regular seats in the broken sides of the hollow, so he trampled down the long grass and tall plants, and broke off hazel boughs, or twisted them in one with another, till he formed a little open cove in the bushes, just like a little parlour in a wood, or a sweet little nest, just big enough to hold five or six children. He gathered beautiful green moss which was now wet with dew, and laid it in the sun to dry, and this he meant for cushions for the seats. There never was a prettier little spot than that; it was a regular bower, and though it was midsummer, the blackbirds and thrushes sang with all their might, and so did the larks up in the clear bright sunshine.

"It's a regular Sunday morning," said Harry joyfully to himself, "every thing, dumb creatures, as well as Christians, know when it is Sunday morning!"

His heart was full of joy; he had but one fear, and that was, lest they should come before he was ready for them.

But he need not have feared that! He was ready hours before they came. The church bells began ringing for morning service. Harry never thought they would be so late, never! He ex-

pected they would come by eight o'clock, by nine at farthest, and now it wanted only a quarter to eleven.

All at once a thought came into his mind. Suppose they did not come at all! It was a miserable thought. He climbed upon a low bough of an oak, and looked out over the whole extent of the "big field." The sun shone burning hot; there was not a single shadow upon the whole extent of yellow corn. It quite dazzled his eyes. He could see the heads and shoulders of people who were walking along the footpath on their way to church, for the church lay half a mile from the village, and those who liked the fields best must go that way. He saw them moving onward at little intervals above the level of the yellow corn; they were in their Sunday best, and seemed to be so happy! He jumped down from the tree, and ran to the end of the footpath; for some of these people must have passed Dick Tattersall's, and could tell him if he seemed to be coming. At the end of the road he met old Nelly Wardle, and her daughter Jenny, and they lived next door to the blacksmith's.

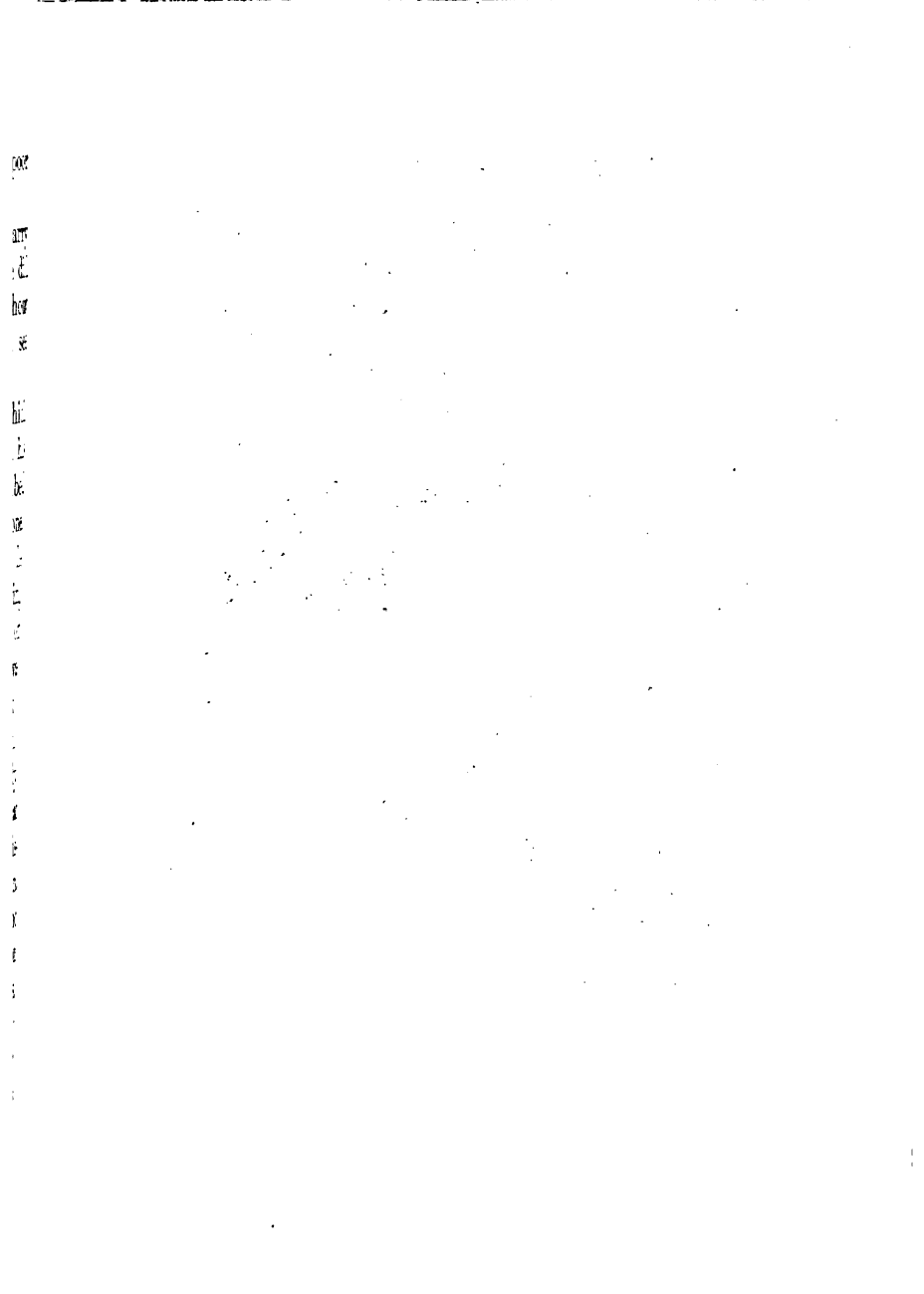
"Did you see any thing of Dick Tattersall?" asked he from them.

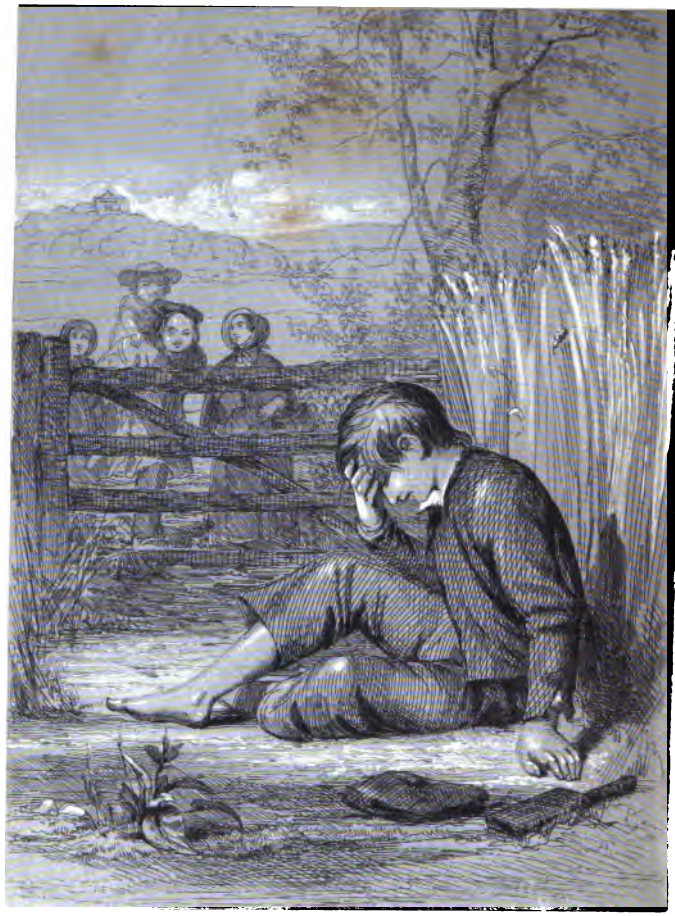
"Oh yes," old Nelly said, "Dick was sitting among the children, as usual, on the shady side of

the house, making dandelion chains for them, poor things!"

"Then he does not mean to come!" said Harry to himself, with a great pang at his heart. He did not speak a word aloud, but walked on without looking any body in the face lest they should see that he was crying.

At the end of the footpath was a gate, which opened into a shady lane, down which Dick and his young party ought to have come. Harry climbed on the bottom bar; and as the gate was a tall one, his chin just rested on the top bar, and there he stood with great blinding tears in his eyes staring up the empty lane. The church bells had left off ringing, every body was in church, not a soul was now coming from the village. Every thing looked silent and solitary; and as Harry thought of all the long morning he had spent in getting things ready, and in waiting, and all the long rest of the day that he should now have to spend by himself in disappointment, he felt quite miserable and forsaken. He thought that Dick and all the children who had promised to come and see him, were sitting on the shady side of the house, making dandelion chains, as happy as could be. They had forgotten him; they had forgotten their promise: they cared for nothing but amusing themselves! He shut his eyes to keep back the tears for a while, and then,





HARRY TWIGG'S SORROW IN THE CORNFIELD.

fairly overcome, slipped down from the gate, threw himself on the grass, and cried bitterly.

If he had not been crying, and if he not been so miserable, and if he had only stayed a little longer looking over the gate, he would soon have seen a very pleasant sight! He would have seen Dick Tattersall carrying the sturdy little Joshua on his back, and Nancy with a sheaf of Timothy-grass in one hand, on every bent of which were at least four-and-twenty wild strawberries like great coral beads, and in the other, a little basket as full as ever it would hold, and covered with a cloth; and Peggy Ford, with something in her hand, that looked very like a big basin tied up in a buff handkerchief. And down the lane they were trudging as fast as they could come, chattering as they came along.

Poor Harry, who lay crying in the grass, heard something just before they reached the gate, which made him jump up all at once and rush forward. He heard their voices, and there they were all four of them! They saw that he had been crying, and he did not pretend to deny it, for he said he thought that they would not come; he thought they would stay at home and make dandelion chains instead.

"Not come!" Dick exclaimed, "why, he had been out ever so early that very morning to get strawberries out of Smith's spinny! and they would

have been there two hours earlier, only Mrs. Ford's cat was lost, and they had to find her. She had been shut out all night, and Mrs. Ford was quite miserable till she was found, and they all went to hunt her. And then Peggy had such a deal to tell about their trouble on her account; and Harry had to tell how he had seen her mewing at the door, and little Joshua had to tell that he it was who saw her first, and nobody would believe it was she; and she was in Martin's old pig sty, and nobody could tell how she got there. And then Nancy wanted Harry to look at the strawberries all strung on the tall Timothy-grass; and then they had to tell that they were doing this, and not making dandelion chains when Mrs. Wardle saw them; and there was such a clatter of merry voices all talking together as never was heard before.

Harry gave little Joshua the clapper, and he strutted on clapping with all his might, and the others ran on down to the little parlour among the hazel-bushes, and there they examined what they all had for dinner. Nancy Tattersall opened her basket, and there was such a plenty of cold beans and bacon, and bread, and a lustre-mug, that looked like silver, to drink out of, and a great three-cornered piece of cold batter pudding, at the bottom of which was a layer of currants an inch thick; and there was a cold rice pudding in Peggy

Ford's basin, which her mother had baked the night before, and all the strawberries beside! Now, was not it a famous dinner? They all thought it as good as a Lord Mayor's feast.

The visiters said that Harry had made a beautiful little parlour for them, and they admired the seats and the moss cushions, and every thing. Harry felt very happy, and so did they all; and as they were very hungry, they agreed to eat Peggy Ford's rice pudding now, by way of luncheon. Little Joshua did nothing all the morning but strut about and clap, and not a single bird came near the corn.

Of course, they supposed that old Farmer Broadbent was gone to church; but instead of that he was walking down to his big corn field, and reached the other side of the old marl-pit just as they had finished eating the cold pudding. They did not see him because he stood behind the hazel-bushes, but *he* saw *them;* and presently, crash! he came through the hedge just below, and stood before them, with his face all red with heat, and with his hat in one hand, and his stick and a great red pocket-handkerchief with which he was going to wipe his face, in the other. He was dressed in his Sunday clothes; his brown coat, yellow and black and white striped waistcoat, which was all unbuttoned, and drab kerseymere breeches, and grey

stockings, for to-day he was without his gaiters because it was so hot. He was dressed just as he was when he sat as overseer of the poor; and Harry was quite frightened, for his face looked very red, and when he lifted up his red pocket-handkerchief to wipe his face, he lifted also his great stick, because, as we said, he held them both in the same hand.

"You childern seem to be very merry thear!" said he, "you've gotten a famous feast, and a nice shady corner to eat it in! But you would na be worser for a nice bottle o' my best fizzing beer; so if one on you will go wi' me, I'll gie you one!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Dick, jumping up at once, ready to go with him.

"Thank ye, mester!" said Harry, surprised, and looking as pleased as Punch.

"And th' little one does a' th' work to-day, I reckon!" said the farmer smiling at little Joshua, who was making noise enough to deafen any body.

Dick went with the farmer for the bottle of "fizzing beer," and he heard him laughing in the best kitchen, where Mrs. Broadbent, who had just come in from church, was sitting, and he told her all about "a parcel o' childern that were having a feast wi' little Harry Twiggs, all among the hazzle bushes," and how he had promised them a bottle of "fizzing beer;" and then Mrs. Broadbent was

heard laughing too, and she said that one of "those gooseberry pies" would not come in amiss among them; and then out she came with a great big gooseberry pie, baked in a brown dish, with all sort of zigzags on the crust, and a bottle in her hand; and Mr. Broadbent came after her, and neither of them could help laughing still, and he said, and so did she, that they hoped the pie would be to their liking, and the beer too; only one thing they must remember, not to break either bottle or dish, for if they did they should both of them make a pretty row!

Away went Dick as fast as he could with the great big pie in the brown dish, and the bottle of fizzing beer. Now, only think what a surprise to every body! Nancy, when she saw the pie exclaimed, "My goodness!" and Peggy, "Oh my!" Little Joshua's eyes opened twice as wide as common, and he clapped louder than ever, while Harry capered about like a wild Indian, singing with all his might—

Oh my!
Here's a gooseberry pie
With a zig-zag crust for dinner.

When they had set out their dinner, they sat down to it; and, would any body believe it? there they sat eating their dinner among those pleasant

shady "hazzle bushes," as old Farmer Broadbent called them, from half-past twelve o'clock till a quarter to three, when the bells began ringing again for afternoon service.

There never was such a dinner as that! and all the time it lasted little Joshua kept strutting about clapping as loud as he could, so that the birds heard him all over the big field; and so did farmer Broadbent as he sat under the sycamore tree, before his kitchen door, smoking a pipe after dinner.

About an hour after this, up rose the farmer from the bench under the tree where he had been having a comfortable nap after his pipe, and smiled to himself as he thought of the children in the cornfield. And what did he do then? Why, without saying a word to any body, he walked down to see what they were after, saying all the time to himself, what a foolish old fellow he was to find so much amusement in "a parcel of poor childern." And though he knew that it was not right to be a listener, yet he went and stood close behind the hazel-bushes again, just on purpose to hear what they were talking about; and if the children had not been so much taken up with their own talk, they must have heard him laughing to himself.

They had drunk all the "fizzing beer," every drop of it; and now Dick Tattersall was lying on his back, among the grass and flowers before the

little wood-parlour door, and kicking up his legs, and thumping down his great heels again in a very ecstasy of delight, and all the time his tongue was rattling away like a mill-clapper. The afternoon service at the church was just over, and Dick was pretending that he could see all the folks come out, and was talking for them; now, very solemnly for the clergyman; now, very pompously for the schoolmaster; and now, very savagely for the constable, who was so hard and pitiless to the poor, and whom every body disliked so much. And then he told them a long story of how, the very Sunday after the constable had seized on poor old Nelly Wardle's bed for rent, he stuck a pin into a long stick, and sat in the pew behind the constable, and poked the stick through the bottom of the broken pew, and pricked the great calves of his legs. The constable fancied it was horse-flies that were biting him so keenly, and kept slapping his calves, till they could hear him half over the church; and then the pin pricked him again, and then he slapped; and then another prick, and another great slap, till at last up he jumped in a great rage and went out. When church was over, he gave the clerk a great scolding for not opening the church doors and windows on week days, that the flies might not so be famished on Sundays, till they were ready to eat folks' flesh off their bones! That

was what Dick was saying, while Farmer Broadbent was listening.

How the children laughed! and Dick kicked up his legs and banged them down again, just as if it was a great steam-engine at work. The farmer behind the bushes laughed quite as much as they did; and then he walked away, thinking how pleased he was that poor little Harry Twiggs had such a merry company, and feeling sorry only for one thing, and that was, that he could not give Dick Tattersall sixpence for pricking the constable who had so sorely distressed a poor widow, without betraying himself as a listener. That was the only thing that troubled him; nothing at all troubled the children, they were as merry as fairies.

"And there they are at this moment," said Herbert's and Meggy's father, "and are you not as much pleased as the farmer, that they have had a merry day of it, and such a good dinner?"

"What a long day to-morrow will seem to poor little Harry all by himself!" said Meggy.

"Not at all so!" returned her father, "Harry will do nothing all day but think of the fun he had the day before; one day like that would last him a week. And besides that they promised to come and see him again next Sunday. The farmer heard them; and so he told his wife, hardly an hour ago, as they were sitting in the arbour at tea, and she

said in a minute that she would take care that they should have another gooseberry pie, and another bottle of fizzing beer to make merry with ; and Mrs. Broadbent is a woman that always keeps her word ; only she made her husband promise that he would say nothing to the children about it beforehand.

Meggy and Herbert were delighted ; they clapped their hands for joy, and forgot all about the excessive heat which had made them so uncomfortable before.

CHAP. XXVII.

A GREAT PLEASURE JUST BEGINNING.

THE children's coughs soon began to mend, and in a few weeks a great and most unexpected happiness resulted from them. They were both of them to go to Hastings for one whole month, with their mamma and their sister Mary, and Martha the maid. Never had they heard such good tidings before.

"I am glad that we had the hooping-cough," said Meggy.

"Good often comes out of evil," said Herbert, who had a little more experience of life than his sister.

Meggy heard her mamma and her sister say that Hastings was a very pleasant place, and by the sea-side; all her mamma's friends said the same thing, and this general opinion filled her with the most charming idea of the place. Some of the boys from the school, who came up to see Herbert, had been at Hastings with their mammas, and they told him the same thing. It is impossible to say with what delight the children thought of going there.

They were to set off on Tuesday, and on Monday

what a joyful thing it was to see all things piled on the nursery table ready to be packed up!

The happy morning came, as all happy mornings are sure to come, and yet people are often as impatient about them as if there were some doubt on the subject. The morning came: all the trunks and portmanteaus and carpet-bags were brought down into the hall. Their papa gathered a basket full of beautiful purple grapes and peaches for them to take with them, and there was another basket of biscuits and sandwiches. There was no longer any question about their going. Martha brought down her little green wooden box, and it stood among the other luggage.

What a charming thing it was to be setting off on a journey; Meggy thought it pleasanter, even this time, than when she set off with Ellen into the country. The children were impatient; they said they wondered how it was that time seemed to go so slowly when they were waiting for any pleasure, but so fast when they were enjoying it. It seemed to them as if it would never be ten o'clock, at which time the carriage was to come which would take them to the railroad station. Their mamma sat reading; so did their sister; their papa was writing; the hands of the clock seemed absolutely not to move; the children went and seated themselves on a portmanteau in the

hall, jumping up every minute to see if the carriage were not coming. Now, they guessed what sort of a horse would be in it; whether a white one, or a black one, or a bay; and then they watched the omnibuses drive up and down, and the carts and carriages; and guessed whether, after having shut their eyes for half a minute, they should see a man or a dog first, and then if they happened to guess right, they were very much pleased.

At length, to their great joy, Ellen called them to be dressed, and then they met Martha coming down stairs with her bonnet on. Now they were quite sure they should be too late. Herbert said he would dress himself while Ellen got Meggy ready. There was such a deal of laughing and talking, and so much bustle, that they were twice as long about dressing as they need have been. But now they and every body were ready; and now the carriage was at the gate, and the man was fixing on the trunks, and the carpet-bags. Herbert carried out one carpet-bag himself, and then the basket of fruit was given to him in charge, and he was to take care of that all the journey.

And now every body was seated, and off they drove, and really and truly the time was come when the journey to Hastings began.

CHAP. XXVIII.

RAILROAD SPEED, COACH TRAVELLING, ARRIVAL AT THE SEA-SIDE.

HERBERT enjoyed all the bustle at the railway station quite as much as Meggy had done a few weeks before.

And now, what a happiness it was to be both of them, sitting in a nice snug railway carriage, looking out at the window and talking together of all the new and wonderful things that they saw! They were very much amused with the sea of chimneys and house-tops, through which, when they first set out, they seemed to be floating; and then again they came to market gardens where there were immense beds of rhubarb, now looking withered and desolate, but which in spring had produced such thousands and thousands of stalks of rhubarb, and out of which such thousands of pies and puddings had been made. Their mamma told them to think of the hundreds of little children, many of them poor children, who had rejoiced over the puddings and pies made from this very rhubarb, and which had been to them like the most delicious luxury.

And then, just as had been the case with the Southampton Railway, on which Meggy had travelled, they came presently to charming country-houses, with their lawns and flower-gardens, and pleasant shrubberies, and they saw ladies and little children walking in them; and then to some grand mansion standing on a green slope, in a wooded park; and then to little towns where there was a station, and where the train stopped; and the tall police-men came past saying, Croydon, or Reigate; and some passengers got out, and others, fresh ones, got in; and then the steam screamed, and off they went again.

All this was charming; but nothing interested Herbert like the Electric Telegraph, of which he now heard for the first time. It was wonderful to him; it interested him beyond words; he never was tired of talking about it, and he kept his eyes fixed on those marvellous wires, and could think of nothing else.

Presently they came to a tunnel; this was the first tunnel they had been through since they had travelled two years before on a railroad in Belgium, when they returned with the family from Germany. They had almost forgotten all about that long, pleasant journey, but now this tunnel brought it back to their minds. Yes, there had been just such a tunnel in Belgium or Germany, and they had

been then almost frightened at the long darkness, and the loud, roaring, rushing noise of the train as it had passed through. They were not at all frightened now; they thought of dungeons and dark, deep caverns; it seemed to them a pleasant variety; a little excitement which was not the less agreeable for having something of the dismal and terrific in it. And now they were out of it; out again into the pleasant daylight, and the sun shone over every thing with a warm clear radiance.

For the first time in his life Herbert saw, this day, the beauty there was in an extensive landscape: he had never thought any thing about it before. The trees were changing their leaves; the woods had a rich russet and golden hue; the far woodlands of Kent stretched out before him, and the far distance was softened till it faded away into a soft and hazy blue. It was like a beautiful picture, and the children's mamma and elder sister took as much delight in it as Herbert did; but what pleased them so much was his pleasure; it was evident that his mind had that morning first become conscious of the pictorial beauty of nature.

In a while they came to where the line of the railroad cut through vast fields of hops; and here and there they saw groups of hop-pickers, men, and women, and children, busy stripping the poles, which had been taken up and leaned against the

bins of their clustered flowers. They saw that the bin into which the hops were picked was a large sort of box, formed from canvass, stretched upon a frame; and they saw also that the hop, which is a plant of quick growth, and which in one summer runs many feet up these tall poles, had been cut down at its root, and thus the pole was easily taken up, and carried, with all its load of leaves and flowers, to the side of the bin, where it was stripped.

There was something very cheerful and picturesque in these groups of hop-pickers. Mary wished that she could stay and make a sketch of them, and Herbert and Meggy thought that they should very much like to go into a hop-garden, and help the poor little hop-pickers at their work. And then there were those funny, round, brick buildings with tall slanting roofs, and each with a sort of odd white wooden cap on. What were they? They were the kilns in which the hops were dried before they were packed into great bags called "pockets," and in which the hops were sent to all parts of the kingdom. There was always a ramping horse, holding up his fore legs, their mamma told them, painted on these great hop-bags, and that was a sign that they came out of Kent; because a prancing horse was the sign or arms of Kent, and had been so ever since the time

when the two Saxon brothers Hengist and Horsa, both of whose names signify horses, and whose banner, no doubt, was the horse, took possession of this part of England.

Hop-picking seemed a very pleasant employment on this warm, bright autumn day; and so it is in fine seasons; and the poor people, who come with their whole families for this purpose, find it pleasant enough when the weather is favourable. When it is wet they often suffer greatly, and then they find a comfortable shelter in these kilns, or oasts, as they are called, which are always heated to dry the hops in, where the poor pickers then dry their wet clothes, and make themselves as comfortable as they can.

The railroad at that time was not made to Hastings, and therefore they had to go part of the way by coach. Herbert was very sorry to be shut up inside of the coach; he would have liked so much better to have gone on the outside, and looked about him and seen the beautiful country, and got the first sight of the sea. However, as he could not have his wish, he and Meggy contrived to see a good deal through the windows. At last they saw the sea, the bright sea, lying stretched out before them, and looking like a sun-lit mirror of polished steel.

On the west stretched out a headland with a strongly defined outline, and that was Beechy

Head; on this side of it lay Pevensey Bay, where William the Conqueror landed with all his Normans! And now to the left, came into sight the old grey ruins of the Castle of Hastings, on its green heights, overlooking the sea. The children were delighted; they knew just enough of the early history of England, to understand how interesting this view was; and when their sister said that it was like looking at a grand historical picture, they understood that also.

They were all delighted with this first view of Hastings. Presently they came down to the level of the sea, and drove along its margin. The setting sun shone in warm crimson light upon the moving water; they themselves were driving from the west, so that the faces of all the people they met looked quite glowing with a rosy light; the effect was very singular. The tide coming in and a fresh breeze made the water still more animated. Herbert had never seen any thing which had pleased him so much; the delight which he had in the beautiful noonday landscape was nothing to his astonished pleasure now.

"Only look at those beautiful waves—are they billows, mamma?" asked he: "look how they come dashing and tumbling up! Oh, how I love the sea!"

The children's happiness was increased by their

finding that the house in which they were to lodge was close to the sea. There was nothing but the pebbly beach between them and the water. They could stand at the window of their little room and look out on the sea; they could hear its roar as plainly as if they stood beside it.

"It roars like a thousand dragons!" said Herbert enthusiastically. "I shut my eyes and fancy it is dragons—I love to hear it! I did not think that the sea was so grand!"

CHAP. XXIX.

ABOUT MANY THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN THREE DAYS.

THE next morning the sun shone as bright as possible. The tide was again coming in, and as soon as breakfast was over the children went out with Martha. They went to buy, for each, a little wooden spade to dig in the sand with; but this they soon found to be a very useless thing, for there was no sand scarcely to dig in. They bought also, for each, a little old-fashioned, odd-looking wooden basket, in which to collect sea-weed and shells, and these were very useful whenever they went out.

When the tide went down they found treasures at every step; there were shells and sea-weed, and star-fish, and those little black, bladder-like weeds shaped like a little hand barrow which the children at Hastings call "money-purses." Meggy, who was not nearly as strong as Herbert, found it very fatiguing to walk on the shingle, so she and Martha sat and rested whilst Herbert wandered about near to them looking for treasures and wonders.

Every thing was wonderful both to him and

THE CHILDREN AT HASTINGS.

Meggy; but nothing pleased him more than the sea itself. He used to go out with his sister Mary, when the tide was either coming in or at its height, and walk close to its margin, or stand and watch it. There was, to his mind, indescribable beauty in one great wave rolling up after another, coming up with such power and grandeur, and then, just as it reached its extreme limit, heaving itself up and giving a plunge head forward as it were, and tumbling like a cascade fringed with spray, headlong upon the shingle, and then rolling back again with a rattling *shaling* sound.

One morning Herbert and his sister Mary went out together. There had been several wet and stormy days. The wind had howled, the sea had roared, and the sea and the sky had both been of a dull leaden colour; it looked very wild and gloomy. The children had not been able to go out for two whole days; they had occupied themselves in arranging their shells and seaweeds in a little cupboard, on the shelves of which they displayed their treasures, and never were tired of looking at them. Here were assembled every kind of shell, and every kind of seaweed which they had yet found. It was to them like a little marine museum.

During these two stormy days Herbert counted all the sea gulls which he saw, and they amounted to twenty-seven: he wrote a letter to his papa,

and, for his own pleasure, did several multiplication sums.

On the third of these gloomy mornings, however, his sister Mary proposed to him, that, as it was not cold, and as it did not then rain, he should have his coat on, and they should take an umbrella, in case rain should come on, and sally forth — they two — and walk up the shore, as far as the weather would permit them. This proposal was quite to Herbert's taste: they wrapped themselves up, and off they set; Herbert, with his odd little wooden basket, which looked as if it had come down from the time of the Danes, in his hand, and his sister with the umbrella.

It looked very grey in the sky, and it looked very grey on the water: they were very much afraid they should not even reach the base of the East Cliff. Stout fishermen, in oil-skin covered hats and reddish-coloured tanned smock frocks, were standing among the fishing boats. Not a fisherman had been out for these three days. The man on the preventive service stood with his telescope under his arm, looking as if he wished the weather would clear, that he might look out for something. Here and there a gentleman with a boy, or a gentleman without one, wrapped up in great coats, and with umbrellas in their hands, were walking on the shore: Herbert's sister was the only lady that had ventured out.

It was a dull, still morning, and the only thing that seemed to have any life in it was the sea: it came thundering up with heavy billows that looked like lead under that gloomy sky. There had been so few people out that morning that there was plenty of seaweed to be picked up; and Herbert had not gone far before he found much finer pieces, and even two or three kinds which he had not seen before. He found shells too, both large and small, and feathers of the sea gull; and all these, laid together in his queer little wooden basket, made a very pretty appearance.

On they walked, past the town and under the beautiful East Cliff which they were so afraid of not being able to reach, and where great rocks were scattered thickly about the shore, and among which the dark sea, with its foaming billows, seemed to boil and churn and lash itself into fury.

By this time the clouds began to break away; and, though it was not clear enough for the sun to come out, it was very pleasant.

"I am glad we came," said Herbert.

"It is a deal better to have courage and not to be afraid of little difficulties," said his sister.

"Yes, I know that by my reading, and my multiplication-table," said Herbert; and the two were beginning to moralise about bold, determined people always having a deal less trouble, and being

able to accomplish a deal more than timid, irresolute ones, when Herbert stopped short and uttered a scream of delighted surprise.

He had found something; what could it be? He had nearly set his foot upon it. Was it alive, or was it dead? Was it a fish or a land-animal? Herbert could not remember any such creature as that in Bewick. It was alive! Yes, it moved; it had such a quantity of legs! What a queer thing it was! Herbert said, that perhaps it might be a duck-billed platipus. No, it could not be a duck-billed platipus either, for that had something like a duck's beak, but this had nothing of the kind. This thing was something like a long, fat mouse, with its head, and legs, and tail, all squeezed into its body, and with about twenty little legs on each side: there was a coarsish sort of hair on its back and on its sides; and its sides looked quite metallic, and reflected colours like the inside of the Venus-ear-shell. No, certainly it was not a duck-billed platipus. Then, perhaps, suggested Herbert, it was quite a new kind of creature which nobody had ever seen before; perhaps they should have the honour of discovering it, and it would be called after them. The idea was quite delightful. Unfortunately, his sister could not flatter him with the hope that it might be so. But Mary would, she said, ask somebody...

Presently they saw an old fisherman standing on a sandy piece of beach, among wild rugged rocks, and to him they went. He was very busy digging in the sand. They waited till he made a pause in his work, and then they asked him, if he had ever seen such a thing as that. The old man had a face as weather-beaten and as rugged as the rocks among which he stood. He looked at them and then at the creature about which Herbert was so much interested, and taking it into his great rough hand he turned it over. Herbert thought that certainly he never had seen such a creature before, and was getting quite excited when the old man said,—

"Why yes, it's a sea-mouse; there's plenty of them hereabouts, and they are very handsome in *sperrits!*"

This, then, was a sea-mouse. All at once Herbert's desire to be the discoverer of a new animal gave way to a fresh idea. House-mice he knew, and field-mice, and wood-mice; and this, then, was their little comical ocean-cousin, the sea-mouse. He had heard read in German stories of *meer-katzen*, or sea-cats. He could now fancy the sea-cat lying in wait for the funny little sea-mouse. It was quite a poetical idea, and was very interesting to him.

He put his sea-mouse in his basket among his

treasures, and felt quite an affection for it. While he was thinking about this he had one ear open all the time to listen to what his sister was talking to the old man about. He said that he was setting baits for fish in the sand. He had a hook baited with a piece of fish fastened to a short line, the end of which, being tied to a brick or heavy stone, was buried in the sand. In this way he told them he sometimes caught cod and conger-eels. It was very uncertain, however; sometimes he could catch a good deal, and sometimes he set his baits, tide after tide, day after day, and took nothing.

There was something very slow and melancholy about the poor old man; his face and hands were as rough and old-looking as the bark of an old tree; his hair was thin and wiry, and stood out from under his old crumpled hat; his joints seemed all stiff like rusty hinges; he said that he was very rheumatic and could not do much; but, thank the Lord, he had good children that did not let him want for any thing; but that he came down every day, and set his baits, and if he caught any thing, why then he was thankful, if not, he set his baits again, and hoped for better luck next tide.

Herbert and his sister bade the old man good morning, and then walked on: they talked about the poor, old rheumatic man, who seemed so slow, and yet so patient. Mary said he reminded her of

Wordsworth's leech-gatherer; but as Herbert had never heard about the leech-gatherer, his sister explained to him how Wordsworth had met with a very old man like the one they had parted with, and that he was standing patiently by a pond of water, and stirring among the mud in search of leeches. The poet, who was in a melancholy state of mind, and was ready to think there was nothing but trouble in the world, and who thought, as he watched him, how wretched was the lot of that poor old man, began to talk to him; but the old man, instead of complaining and bemoaning either his own fate or that of others, was full of cheerfulness and thankfulness, and thus the poet felt that he might learn a deal even from a poor leech-gatherer.

Herbert understood all this, and it was very interesting to him; and then, after they had done talking of him, they talked of the queer little sea-mouse, and all the other wonderful things which they had found; and these subjects lasted them until they reached home again.

They were rewarded for their boldness in venturing out on that dull, grey morning. Before they turned homeward the grey cloud had melted away into soft blue ether; the sun came out, the shingly beach was soon dry; and that was the last storm, or even rain, that they had while they stayed at Hastings.

CHAP. XXX.

ABOUT MANY THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN ONE DAY.

One morning (it was the most beautiful morning that ever was seen) the sun shone with a warm, golden light into their chambers before the children were awake. Beechy Head and Eastbourne stood clearly distinct in the eastern light; the morning sun was so dazzlingly reflected in the sea that they could not look upon it. The children were impatient to be up and dressed; people were already out on the shore before they were out of bed. For that one morning they did not care about seeing the little donkey milked at the next house, where was the poor sick child, and yet hitherto this had been one of the morning's interesting events.

As soon as breakfast was over they set out with their mamma and sister, to go a long way up the shore, which, according to Herbert's account, who had been up it on that gloomy morning, was the most charming thing in the world. Herbert carried a little basket filled with biscuits and apples, and Mary took her sketch-book, that she might

bring away sketches of some of the beautiful and picturesque things which she might see.

Before they had gone far they came to the place where the fish was brought in from the fishing-boats which had been out in the night. The large fishing-boats, with their large tan-coloured sails, lay a little way out from the shore, in deep water, and, between them and the shore, went to and fro the little boats which brought in the fish. It was a very busy and a very amusing sight; every body looked so busy and so cheerful; the strong fishermen, in their huge waterproof boots, and tanned short linen frocks, were carrying out baskets full of shining, silvery herrings, which they poured out upon the shore, and there they lay in little mounds, by thousands and thousands, like some strange dream of fish. Other men were busy packing up these fish into square wicker-baskets, which were all to be sent off directly to London. Groups of women and children were standing about, laughing and talking, and looking on. There was a pretty young woman, with a child in her arms, and two elder ones holding at her apron. Nothing could be prettier than this group. They looked so healthy, and so good-humoured; and presently there came up to them a stout merry-faced fisherman, brown and weather-beaten, in his coarse fisherman's dress, helping to bring up a huge basket of fish. The

moment the children saw him, they let go their mother's apron and sprang towards him with a shout of joy: the baby saw him, and kicked and screamed for delight; the mother smiled; the father emptied out the shining, slippery fish; and then catching up both little children at once, one in each arm, gave them such a hug of affection, as made them scream again: he gave, first to one, and then to the other, a loud, smacking kiss, and then snatching the baby from the mother, tossed and tickled, and twirled it about, and held it up aloft on the palm of his huge, strong hand, and the baby, accustomed to such rough merriment, screamed and kicked, and roared again with laughter. It was a pleasant sight! He was a fine fellow, that fisherman; and he had a warm, loving heart, under his coarse, tan-coloured frock.

Herbert and Meggy watched all that went on with great delight; and when their mother reminded them that many of the disciples of Jesus Christ were rough weather-beaten men, like those who went out at night on the seas of Galilee and Tiberias to catch fish, they felt only fresh interest in what they saw.

The tide was sufficiently low to leave visible the large blocks of stone with which the part of the beach below the East Cliff is scattered. Such stones as are usually covered by the tide are over-

grown by a short, close-growing sea-moss, of a rich green velvet-like colour; the angles of many of the blocks of stone are worn off by the action of the waves, and this roundness and this moss gives to them the fanciful appearance of huge heads covered with green wigs. Herbert and Meggy were delighted with the idea. They amused themselves by fancying all kind of queer, grotesque faces to each of these bewigged heads, and recalled all the stories that they had ever heard read of mermen and mermaids, sitting on rocks in the sea, combing their long green hair. Surely this must be a great company of sea-gods and goddesses, or mermen and mermaids, whose heads were only just above water, or else old Neptune and his court had met here, and now were looking about them with their odd stony faces and sleek green hair.

The children found endless amusement here. On the tops of some of the larger blocks of stone there were hollows, which were still full of water, left from the tide which a few hours before had covered them: these they called lakes on the tops of mountains. They made boats of little limpet shells, and twisted up little tiny bits of paper, which they called fishermen, and set in them. Herbert blew them along, and it was the greatest delight imaginable to see how the one jostled the other, and what a natural desire they seemed to have to sail in

company; and then Herbert blew a great hurricane and upset them all. Was not that a thing to lament over!

Herbert showed his mother and Meggy the place where he had found his sea-mouse; but this time there was not one to be seen. Suppose the sea-cats had eaten them all up, he said, would not that be a misfortune!

The old man was again setting his baits. They went to him and asked what luck he had had the night before. He told them that he had caught nothing, not a single fin! But he was setting his baits again, and may be, he said, he should be more successful the next tide. He did not seem at all discouraged by his ill-luck; he looked as quiet and as patient as ever. They admired his patience and his perseverance, and they all agreed, even Herbert and Meggy, that he was a good example to every one of them.

The billows danced in the sunshine and broke in beautiful white foam around the green heads of the old sea-gods: curlews and sea-gulls flew along the water, and chattering, conceited jack-daws by hundreds wheeled round the tops of the cliff, and seemed as if they were saying, "Here we are, Herbert and Meggy, this fine morning."

Before long, their mamma thought they had all gone far enough without resting, so they sat down

among the rocks, at the foot of Ecclesbourne-glen to rest, and the children, finding that they were hungry, eat some biscuits and apples. Whilst they were thus sitting, a little boat came skimming along the sea at about a hundred yards' distance from the shore. Ladies and gentlemen were seated in it. The boat seemed as light as a shell, and was painted light-green; a sailor in a blue shirt and red cap was rowing; the ladies were in bright-coloured dresses, and had green parasols in their hands. With all its gay colouring and its smooth rapid movement, it was just like a boat in a fairy tale. Oh, how pretty it was! It glided along in the sunshine, and the water dropped from the oars like shining silver. Herbert and Meggy were seized with a desire for a sail in such a boat as that. They left off playing and watched it for a long time, and as it went further off, they saw two sea-gulls dashing about in the golden sunshine, between them and the boat, and this made it look only the more like a lovely picture. After they had watched these objects till they were tired, they turned their attention to something else, and thus, after a very pleasant little rest, they set off again to walk further up the shore.

They walked on and on, and now they came to where little broken pasture fields lay between the cliffs and the sea-shore: a few scattered sheep were

grazing upon them; the grass was beautifully green and smooth, and they looked exceedingly pleasant. Mary was the first that mounted up to them, and then she called to them all to follow her. The thrift grew here abundantly upon the broken ledges that were bare of grass. In summer its pretty pink blossoms must make a very lovely show: now, however, there was nothing but the roots with their thickly-set bluish-green leaves, and here and there a dry brown flower stalk, to show how beautiful it had been only a few weeks before. While the children were lamenting to think that the time for the flowering of thrift was over, their sister went onward a few paces in advance of them. All at once she stopped, and eagerly called to them; she had found something which she wished them to see; she had found a white delicate mushroom, peeping with its smooth, round head from the fine green grass, and looking round she saw another, and yet another.

What a delight it was to the children to find actual mushrooms growing here—here, where they were quite at liberty to gather them. Nothing was now thought of but hunting for mushrooms. The basket which had been filled with apples and biscuits was by this time empty, and that was a great convenience. The children thought, that never in all their lives had they seen any thing

prettier than these purely white mushrooms thrusting themselves up out of the emerald green grass. They were so firm and smooth and white on the outside, and of such a delicate pink or rich brown on the underside. They ran here and there; they felt as if they should never be weary of gathering mushrooms. There was a fresh breezy air on these little green knolls; they looked over the sea, and heard the rushing and dashing murmur of the sunlit billows as they broke among the rocks; larks were singing up in the blue sky, and altogether it was so delightful that they felt quite happy.

They went on and on, down into the little hollows where rushes and sea grasses were growing, and then again ascended to a breezy knoll where little rocks jutted out from the green turf, and here and there sprung up a thick little cluster of mushrooms, or a large one grew by itself, rearing up its broad head like a table for the fairies to feast upon.

Presently they came to a very small and solitary hut: it was very small indeed, less a great deal than Robinson Crusoe's. It was built of rude stone, whitewashed, and roofed with sods. Meggy thought that it was exactly such a house as she and Herbert should like to live in. See, there was a window, a very little window at one end, with such a nice view, and at the other end a little

chimney. It was just such a house as would do for them, and they could make such a pretty garden all round it, and they could keep a cat and a bird, and a little dog, and have a little flock of sheep, if they lived there. Herbert thought how charming that would be.

This little house was one of those huts built by the coast-guard to defend them from the weather. The children peeped in and saw the little table within, and the little wooden seat, and the little fire-place in the corner, and the little window that looked up the shore.

"Would not it be pleasant to live here, Herbert?" asked Meggy. Herbert agreed entirely in the idea: their mother and sister were talking to the coast-guard outside, and while they were thus occupied the children indulged themselves by fancying how good mushrooms would be cooked at that little fire, and then they came out and fancied how, if they lived there, they would make a little flower garden, and border its little walks with thrift, which they would go out and gather themselves; and how pretty they would make the house with a honeysuckle, which should run up the front.

They were very unwilling to leave the place; but their mother said it was quite time that they turned their faces homeward, and so, with their

basket of mushrooms, which Herbert would let nobody carry but himself, they descended from the little hut, and, retracing their steps over the grassy knolls, again they came down to the shore. They were astonished to see how far they had gone.

It was always fatiguing to walk on the shingly shore, and now Meggy began to find that she was so tired she did not know how in the world to get along. She had no longer any pleasure in the green heads of the old sea gods; nor did it seem worth while to look even at the little lakes on the tops of the rocky mountains, where, in going, they had sailed their little limpet-shell boats.

They went on very slowly, and Meggy's mamma, like the wearied little girl herself, wished that they had not gone so far. Herbert wished that he were only big and strong enough to carry Meggy all the way home on his back; he was sure he could carry her a long way even as it was; he wished so very much they would let him try. As they were thus toiling on, they heard merry voices behind them, and turning round they saw that it was the gay party who had gone up in the boat, and were now walking along the beach like themselves. The little boat in the meantime kept alongside of them on the water, and was evidently going to take them up a little lower down. As they came up they saw how tired poor Meggy was; one of the ladies

stopped; their mamma had never spoken to her in her life, nor had she ever seen her face before; but the lady looked very kind and good-natured; she said their boat was large; they were going to get in; it was delicious sailing, much better than walking, and, as the little girl seemed so tired, could she not induce them to make use of their boat in getting back to Hastings. Meggy's mamma was very glad; she thought the lady kind, and told her so, and Meggy, tired as she was, jumped for joy. Herbert's face brightened, and his eyes looked twice their usual size: he pulled Meggy a little out of the hearing of the others, and said how glad he was that now they should have a sail in that beautiful boat; and now she would not be tired!

The party got into the boat, and there seemed to be just room for every body; all were safely in, and not a single mushroom was lost in the bustle and scramble and tumbling about of the little boat before every body had taken their seats.

The children had their wish, and were sailing in a lovely little green boat that went skimming along like a shell. The sailor in the blue shirt and the red cap rowed away; the green parasols shaded the ladies from the sun, and the golden noonday light filled the air and lit up the coming-in tide, and the two sea-gulls dashed about in the sunny

air just as they had done before. They could see, as they sat in the boat, the very places on the shore where they had enjoyed themselves so much; there was the place where the sea-mouse was found, and where the old man set his baits for cod and conger eel, and other ladies and other children were now walking there, and some were hunting for shells and seaweed and pebbles, and others were sitting among the old sea-gods reading and sketching. Everybody looked up as they passed, and they could fancy, perfectly well, how they themselves looked, and they could fancy, too, that the little children must say, as they had done, how pleasant it must be to sail on the sunshiny sea in a light green boat that went skimming over the waves like a shell!

CHAP. XXXI.

HOW THE CHILDREN MAKE AN EXCURSION INTO THE COUNTRY, AND WHAT THEY SAW.

One morning their mamma told the children that they were going that day with her and Mary to the Lover's Seat, about three miles from Hastings. They had often heard of the Lover's Seat; they knew many people who had been to it; their mamma had gone one day before; the kind people who had brought them home in the pretty green boat had been that very morning there. They were sure there was something to be seen there; but what it was they did not know, further than that it was pleasant, because every body seemed to like going there. It was very delightful news, therefore, to them that they were that very day going to the Lover's Seat themselves. They were to take some refreshment with them, and were to be out several hours. They never thought of the morning when Meggy was so tired with walking up the shore: she was not tired now, and so they did not think about fatigue. Herbert said he should carry the basket of eatables; he could carry also his sister's sketch book, and the book his

mamma was going to read. They were impatient to be off.

Scarcely had they got out of the door when they saw a pretty little blue carriage drawn by a couple of goats, standing as if waiting for somebody. There were red cushions in the little carriage, and the goats were very pretty, the one was as white as snow, the other of a ruddy brown. A lad with a handsome face and bronze complexion stood beside the goats; he had a little stick in his hand, and was evidently their driver. As soon as he saw the children's mamma he lifted his green cap from his head and smiled very merrily, as if he were in a good humour, and was going to enjoy something very much. Herbert and Meggy had seen this little carriage several times, and there had always been children riding in it, who seemed to find it very pleasant, as they had always thought they should, if they rode in it. But now were they really going to ride in it? It must be so, for their mamma walked up to the carriage and then turned round and looked at the children.

Meggy's face all at once became as red as a rose with joy, and Herbert gave a loud exclamation of delight, as their mother said, "Now, children, what do you think of driving in this pretty carriage, with these pretty goats all the way to the Lover's Seat?"

There was no necessity to wait for any reply; never were there such looks of joy and surprise before.

"Thank you, dear mamma, — thank you, dear mamma!" said they, and while Herbert seated himself with great dignity in the front seat, Martha lifted Meggy into the back seat, and then the basket of provisions and the books, which Herbert had been so anxious to carry, were put in also, and then the bronze-complexioned boy touched the goats with his little stick, and away they went nodding their horns and wagging their beards at every step.

Really, it was a very charming thing to ride in a goat-carriage! The children were wonderfully talkative; they were brimful of happiness, and the subjects of conversation that they found were endless.

It was a lovely day; the larks were singing in the blue sunshiny air; at every turn of the hilly road by which they went they saw something fresh to admire, and whenever they looked behind them, they could see how much they had ascended, for they now were on a level with the green hill-top, in which stood the grey remains of the castle which, with its scattered broken towers, seemed to stretch out to a great extent, whilst beyond this, and as far as their eye could reach, lay the bright, glitter-

ing sea, shining like a mirror of silver. Now and then they saw, at the side of the road, little wild glens, that ran down into lower valleys, and in which were growing those ancient, mossy, dwarfish oak trees, stunted by the perpetual blasts and breezes from the sea, and which, being the first of the kind that the children had seen, amused them very much. They were all turning their heads away from the sea; all grew in a slanting position, shorn off by the keen sea-breeze, as regularly as if clipped by garden-shears. Every branch had a gnarled, aged, weather-beaten look, as if it were hundreds of years old; and the long, hoary moss which clothed them, had the appearance of a venerable beard, which made them look still older.

Flocks of sheep were feeding on the downs and the down-like pastures, and little children were wandering in cheerful companies, or hand in hand, with little baskets and tin cans, by the hedge sides, to gather blackberries. Their mamma and sister gathered blackberries also for Herbert and Meggy, and garlanded their heads with wreaths of rich autumnal leaves, and the scarlet berries of the wild bryony. The little, willing goats, trotted on, nodding their horns and wagging their beards as they went, and the bronze-complexioned boy trudged on beside them, with his merry and handsome face, looking back every now and then to see that all

was right, and to cast a good-natured glance at the children, who seemed so much to enjoy their drive.

They left the goat-chaise at a white gate, where they turned off from the road, and now Herbert carried the provision basket and one of the books, whilst Meggy, anxious to be useful, claimed the privilege of carrying the other. They bounded along like mountain roes, and Herbert was so full of fun and spirits, that he was forced every now and then to set down his book and basket, that he might have the free use of all his limbs for a caper of delight.

The children, who always thought the present pleasure the greatest they had ever enjoyed, now declared that they really never had seen any thing so delightful as the walk was which they were now taking. They passed through old pasture fields, where grew ancient mossy crab-trees, and then down into a deep, deep lane, overshadowed with trees. The banks on either side rose up like slanting walls, and were overgrown and festooned with luxuriant wood plants. Long branches of feathery fern, and the beautiful polished green leaves of the hart's-tongue, looking like some fine plant of the tropics, hung drooping forward from among a complete tangle and carpeting of wild plants, just as if they had been hung there to give sylvan grace and rare beauty to the scene.

If Herbert might have had his way he would have stopped there for hours, to get roots of these beautiful plants for his rockery at home; and it was necessary to explain to him, that if gathered now they would not live until his return, before he was willing to give up the idea. After they left the lane they came to a wood, and little children then came and offered themselves as guides to the Lover's Seat; but Herbert's mamma preferred finding the way by themselves; so after they had stopped and talked to the little children, and given them each a penny, and admired the baby which one of them was nursing, and had then turned back again to give a second penny to another, that they discovered to be lame, they walked on through the wood, gathering, as they went along, a nosegay of such autumn flowers as still remained. There was the little cheerful Herb-robert, and the Aaron's rod, and here and there a piece of campion, and plenty of ragwort, for those who did not despise a flower so common. Herbert and Meggy were in no humour to despise any thing this day, and thus they gathered a very bright nosegay.

At the end of the wood they came, quite suddenly, upon a beautiful scene; they stood in a sort of amphitheatre, opening to the sea. Before them lay the green hill, sloping downwards as smooth and green as velvet; woods bounded it on either

hand. A sort of terrace on the left evidently led to the famous Lover's Seat; for along this broad green path, at various intervals, groups of gay people were seen going and coming. Exactly opposite, and filling up the whole distance, lay the sea looking like one vast expanse of reflected sunshine; here and there on its surface skimmed along little boats, or larger craft with all their sails set, and advancing on with a steady movement that was hardly perceptible. The greatest joy of all, however, to Herbert and his sister, was to see the very object for which they had looked and looked in vain, ever since they came to Hastings. This was a steam-vessel. It was a long way out at sea, but still very distinct: it went on with a smooth stately motion along the expanse of sunshiny water, and leaving its trail of dark smoke behind it. The children were delighted; they called it the Water-Witch, and said that she was going from London to Portsmouth.

At the Lover's Seat, which is perched like a sea-fowl's nest in the side of the cliff overlooking the sea, they took their refreshment. Herbert amused himself with the idea that this was an eagle's nest, and that he was a young eaglet that sat flapping its wings and gaping to be fed.

In returning, instead of pursuing the green terrace on the hill-side, by which they had come, they went down the smooth velvet-like hill into the

valley below. As they descended the hill, a low sound of delicious music reached them; it was like the tones of a musical snuff-box, liquid and sweet; like a ringing, ever-varying peal of the most melodious little bells. The hill-side was scattered with tufts of wild thyme, upon which they trod; and at every step a fragrance seemed to rise from the turf. Here and there shown out a snow-white mushroom, which thrust itself up from the close-nipped herbage like an egg. It was like something in a beautiful poem. The children ran and leapt and shouted for joy. The chiming music grew louder and louder as they approached the wood which ascended from the valley. Along the bottom of this valley ran a little gurgling, sparkling stream, which, coming through the wood from the uplands above, flowed down to the sea.

The low sweet music seemed at first to come from the wood — if it had been moonlight the children might have fancied it a revel of the fairies, it was so sweet and delicious — but when they reached the bottom of the valley, and could see that part of the opposite hill, which had till then been concealed by the wood, they found that it proceeded from a flock of sheep which was grazing in a compact group. They had often heard sheep-bells before, and so had their mother and sister. The old-fashioned sheep-bells, with their dry, monotonous dub, dub, had

often pleased them, because it was odd and country like; and they could fancy the fat old sheep that had the honour of wearing the iron canister without a bottom, thinking that there was great dignity in its one-toned dub, dub. But this was so different! The flock, which was all beautifully white, and every individual sheep of which was worthy to be painted in a picture, wore, each one, a little bell, which sent forth the most musical cadence, low and liquid, and ever-varying. The children were in raptures. Meggy thought it was like the ringing of the bells of flowers, as she had read of it in fairy tales; only one must fancy, she said, that *the music was heard through a magnifying glass.* Herbert thought so too. Their mamma and Mary declared that they had never heard any thing more delicious. They all sat down on the hill-side under the wood and listened. The flock spread itself out, and the music became more soft and low. Meggy shut her eyes and talked again about fairies dancing. She could think of nothing else.

Every thing seemed hushed into a woodland stillness round them; no sounds were heard but the soft sighing of the breeze through the trees; the occasional coo of the wood-dove; the low murmur of the sea, which was now quite hidden from their sight, and the chime of the little bells. They sat

there for a long time, for they would never have been tired of listening to that combination of pleasant sounds; and then they went into the wood, and walked up a pleasant tangled path, where wild rose-sprays seemed to stretch out their long arms to catch them, and by the side of which ran the little gurgling stream that seemed to be singing to itself like a merry-hearted child as it went along its way. In this wood grew ferns and harts-tongue, just as beautifully as they had done in the deep green lane down which they came at first. Large stones lay here and there, covered with green and grey lichens; and cushions of soft green moss grew at the root of many a tall tree, as if it were a region of comfort and beauty designed for the glow-worm and the little wood-mouse.

The path in the wood led them up to the Dripping Well, as it was called, and this well the children thought very beautiful. They were in the happy humour to see beauty in every thing, and so were their mamma and sister. A magnificent chestnut, which grew above it, arched it in like a tent. They all admired the beauty of its twining roots as they jutted from the broken hill-side, and of its grey smooth stem, which rose up like the pillar of the tent; and the outspread beauty of its splendid branches, bending downwards, with their ample leaves now bright with the golden hues of autumn.

It was a lovely bit of sylvan scenery. The little stream which had murmured to them so pleasantly from the very bottom of the valley here fell with a livelier sound from a broken ledge of rock, under the roots of the great chestnut, into a little basin which the water had worn for itself. Ferns and harts-tongue hung drooping and wavering around; green mosses fringed it to the very edge, and hare-bells and campions, the latest of the season, looked forth with their cheerful countenances from a tangle of commoner flowers. The children said it was just such a well as a hermit would like to have had near his cell. They fancied that, in ancient times, there must have been a hermit living somewhere about in these woods.

This was a day's ramble not to be forgotten; and in the evening, when they talked it over, they all agreed that it was one of the pleasantest days they ever had spent.

CHAP. XXXII.

HOW THE CHILDREN AND ALL THE FAMILY WERE DEFEATED NEAR PEVENSEY.

After they had been a fortnight at Hastings their papa and their elder brother joined them. The children knew enough about the early history of England to take great interest in Hastings and its neighbourhood, as connected with William the Conqueror. They had seen Pevensey Bay from a distance, and they heard that the place where that great and bloody battle was fought between Harold and the Conqueror was about seven miles off; but they had no expectation of going to either of these places. It was a very joyful surprise, therefore, when, one day, their papa said that while he stayed with them they would go to both these famous places; and, which was still more delightful, that they would take a boat and go by water to Pevensey.

It was soon decided; the day came on which they were to go to Pevensey. It was a splendid morning, so warm and bright, and the wind was in the right direction; a soft steady breeze just enough to fill their sails, and carry them there in a short time.

Herbert went with his papa to look out for a

boat, and came back again in the highest spirits: they had engaged, he declared, the most beautiful boat in Hastings: two men were to row them, and they were to have a couple of sails; the boat was called the Nautilus — was not that a beautiful name? It was, he declared, a very great deal nicer boat than that in which they had come down from the East Cliff. The men who were to go with the boat said, it was just the day for going to Pevensey, just the right wind: they should get there in an hour and a half with that wind, and it would take them two hours to row back again.

Every body was delighted. Martha was to go with them; and nothing could exceed the zeal with which the children informed her of all those historic facts which made Pevensey so interesting. The basket of provisions was ready; the sun was burning hot, and the party almost scorned the idea of cloaks and warm shawls being taken with them. Mary took her sketch-book, and Alfred the large telescope, and away they went for a day of thorough pleasure.

After rowing a little distance, the men laid up their oars, and began to busy themselves in hoisting the sails: Herbert was deeply interested; he had so much to ask, and so much to see, that he was in every body's way. The sails were hoisted, and the children now thought that nothing could be more charming; they could just imagine how it would

look from the shore. The motion was so smooth and delicious, that they wished they were going to sail in this way for days. Mary began to make a sketch of the elder man, who had a handsome weather-beaten countenance. Presently, however, one of the ropes which confined the sails gave a perverse sort of swing, and knocked off Alfred's hat. The men apologised, as if it were their fault, and made some little alteration, but that alteration only caused the rope to knock off their papa's hat. The men were quite vehement in their apologies: they said that the whole arrangement of one sail must be altered, so down it came, and up it went again; but now it was ten times worse than ever; the sails blustered about like wild things, and carried the little boat quite out of its course. Down came first one sail and then the other: the least alteration in the world, the men said, would right it all, the wind had only changed a point or two; so the sails went up again and all was right for a little while. Thin clouds, however, were now coming up and veiling the sun, and every body began to think about cloaks and warm shawls; the very men pulled their jackets out from a sort of little cupboard at one end of the boat and put them on; and Mary put aside her sketch-book, for the motion of the boat prevented her drawing a line: Meggy was very quiet, much quieter than common.

The sun went behind a thick cloud, and the wind began to blow, and now the wind was in their faces. How was that? It must have changed! The men set about altering the sails again; down they came, and up they went once more: now they were tightened, now they were loosened; now they were hung this way, now that; and now they were taken down altogether, and the men resumed their oars.

It was quite cold now, and a grey gloom had come over sea and sky. The men said it would all be right presently, for the wind would be sure to change again: the sun would come out again, there was no doubt about that, and they should be only an hour longer in going.

The little group in the boat sat wrapped up in their cloaks and shawls; Meggy was very quiet and rather pale, and Alfred and Herbert ravenously hungry. They counted the sea-gulls, and watched the merry little divers, that one minute were on the surface of the water, like a beautiful kind of duck, and the next were gone, but were sure to pop up into sight again, often at a distance of several hundred yards: they watched and admired these, and ate up some dozens of sandwiches, and were as full of life and fun as could be.

In the mean time the boat approached no nearer to Pevensey; it had advanced as far as Bulverhithe, and there it seemed determined to stay. The men said that they would hoist their sails again and

tack, and that, by thus tacking about, they should reach Pevensey early in the afternoon; and that, with this wind, which they now said they thought would continue all day, they should get back in an hour. Every body thought the idea a good one. The sails were hoisted in a sort of slant direction, and the little boat went out before the wind. It tossed up and down, and very soon they seemed to be a long way from land: they came now up to the little scattered fleet of fishing boats which, from the shore, seemed so far out at sea. They seemed to have gone past Pevensey Bay, and to be on a line with Beachy Head. An alteration was now made in the sails to bring the boat to the land, and as the men had said, just within Pevensey Bay. The little boat tossed up and down again, but it was very soon evident that she was slipping past Pevensey, and in a very short time they were once more just opposite to Bulverhithe. A sort of grey haze seemed coming up from the sea; it looked rather dismal; the men said that very often the wind stayed in this quarter for weeks, and brought terrible storms with it.

It was now afternoon, and they were as far off as ever. Once more, however, another attempt was made, but with just the same result; instead of nearing Pevensey, they came down to Bulverhithe. The eatables were now all gone; those who were hungry wanted more, and those who were not hungry wanted to get on shore. The flat shore of

Pevensey Bay looked grey and gloomy: they could count every low martello tower as it followed the windings of the coast; but as the tide, as well as the wind, was now against them, there was no chance of their reaching Pevensey that day.

The men seemed to have changed like the weather; they looked gloomy, and seemed to have lost their gaiety. They evidently wanted their dinners, and saw no chance of having them any where but at Hastings.

There was nothing, therefore, now to be done, but for the children's papa to give the word that the boat's head should be turned about, and the sails again hoisted. In a minute, after their papa had resolved on this, it was done; and in a very short time the boat was going merrily over the sea, tossing on its waves, and skudding before a brisk west wind.

Again they saw the sea-gulls and divers; the boys shouted and sang as they had done before; the men looked cheerful and alert, and little Meggy, nestled in the bottom of the boat, between her mamma and her sister, fell asleep.

They were again at home; they had a good fire made in their little parlour, they sat down to dinner and talked over, the while, their voyage to Pevensey. They all agreed that they had been much less successful than William the Conqueror.

CHAP. XXXIII.

THE CHILDREN GO TO BATTLE, AND SEE MANY THINGS THERE.

THEIR "defeat at Pevensey," as their little unsuccessful trip came to be called, did not discourage them from going to Battle. The wild west wind, which had troubled them the other day, had sunk to rest without a storm; and again the sun shone brightly and beautifully on the morning on which they all set out in a large open carriage on this second excursion.

They had read about the great battle of Hastings, at which Harold was killed, and where thirty thousand men of the English alone lost their lives. They were going now to see the scene of this terrible tragedy, which having been acted there nearly eight hundred years before, had left its name and its bloody memory to all future time. They talked, as they went, of the probable state and aspect of England when William came over from the opposite coasts of Normandy in his flat-bottomed boats. The sea must then have looked much the same as now, excepting for the difference in the shipping, but the aspect of the country itself must have been

very different. Great part of this flat coast of Sussex was then a succession of dreary marshes, and must have presented a bleak and desolate aspect. But for all that William knew that England was a noble country, and was worth trying for, even at the cost of falsehood and bloody warfare. He said, therefore, that Edward the Confessor had left the kingdom to him in his will, and he brought over a vast army to make good his claim, landed at Pevensey, and advancing but a short distance up the country, was met by Harold and his army. They fought; Harold was killed, his army defeated, and from that time William and his Normans became masters of England.

As they approached Battle the little party were struck with the beauty of its situation, and the fine effect produced by its lying, as it does, in the bottom of an open valley, richly wooded and cultivated, together with its church and charmingly picturesque abbey. Around it are lower heights, each stamped with its bloody memory. Here raged the battle, and from here the blood ran down in torrents to the hollow below, and hence it was called the Upper Pool; a little further on, and the blood ran down from this height also, and the hollow below bears the name of the Lower Pool. Yonder, on the opposite side of the valley, is Tellman's hill, so called because William, the day before the

battle, numbered, or, as was said in those days, told over his fighting men. And those green hillocks yonder in the lovely green meadow, where the sun shone, and the lime trees, now wearing the golden glories of autumn, grow so luxuriantly — those hillocks cover the remains of perhaps fifty thousand men. All is meadow pasture now; the turf is green and thick; flowers have sprung up there for countless generations; the summer sun has shone upon it, and the winter snow has covered it as with a garment of peace and purity. All is calm and verdant beauty now; it forms a singularly sweet and picturesque feature in the meadow landscape, and is fit for the garden of a poet: but the time had been when all these mounds — when every particle of which these mounds were composed was quivering with cruel, mortal agony; from which, ere it had been hushed in the long silence of death, had issued sighs and groans, and piercing cries of agony. That was at the time of the great battle of Hastings, which was fought on the 14th of October, 1066. It was just ten days after the anniversary of the battle when the children were there.

Like other visitors, they went through the abbey and saw every thing which was to be seen. This abbey was built by William the Conqueror, and a chapel was raised over the very spot where Harold fell; and, as was the custom in those days, there the

monks prayed for the peace of his soul. The chapel is now quite demolished; nothing remains of it but its foundations and the bases of its pillars, and the memory of the unfortunate man for whose imaginary benefit it was built. The children were much interested in such rooms in the abbey as are shown to visitors; the hall with its armour, and the large painting of the battle of Hastings; and the old parlour of the monks with its low arched roof and aisles like a church. Nothing, however, excited their imagination more than the cells in the old ruinous part of the abbey in which skeleton bodies had been found walled up. That was horrid, indeed! And, until that moment, they had no idea that men had ever been so cruel to their fellow beings as to wall them up alive and leave them to perish. Herbert and Meggy for the first time began to rejoice in the belief that the world is mending. People would not dare to do such things in England now. "Now, if poor people are in distress," said Herbert, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks, "rich people help them, and the Queen and the parliament are always thinking what they can do to make people happier and better! And if any body were to attempt to starve any body to death in a narrow brick dungeon like this, the Queen and all the nation would rise up against them! I know they would!" continued

Herbert, "and so would the newspapers! people could not be so wicked now, if they would, and I don't even think any body would? Are not you glad, Hexey, that you live now and not when people were so wicked and so hard-hearted?" asked he.

The whole party agreed with Herbert in thinking that the world had mended since the times when people might be bricked up in narrow cells and left to perish; but still, his mamma told him, that improved as the world was, in many respects, there was a great deal to be done yet, before it was as perfect as it might be; and that every body must try to do something towards improving it still more, even little boys and girls; and that if they would always remember never to do to others what they should not like others to do to them, then they would be sure not to do any thing wrong towards their fellow-creatures. Herbert and Meggy understood this perfectly: they took each other's hand and walked off, perhaps to continue the subject, but much more likely to talk of something else.

CHAP. XXXIV.

THE CHILDREN VISIT AN OLD HOUSE.

One afternoon our little party made an excursion with some friends of theirs to an old uninhabited house of the Pelhams called Crowhurst, which lies between Battle and Hastings. It was rather late in the afternoon when they got there, and every thing about the place looked desolate and solitary. They left the carriage at the gate, and walked through a large park-like pasture of several hundred acres to the house. The road was cut into deep ruts, and overgrown with grass; fallen leaves lay in damp masses under the wild untrimmed trees, which, forming a sort of grove or belt of wood, concealed the house from view. The trees were old and of luxuriant growth, and here and there a noble silver fir reared itself aloft, forming a beautiful contrast to the golden and russet-hued, and half-stripped beeches and elms.

Presently, a turn in the road brought them within sight of the house, a low grey-stone building which looked still colder and more desolate, by standing, as it were, in the broad gravel walk by which it was surrounded. The flower borders had

a wild, overgrown look, and the lawn in which they lay, and which a sunk fence divided from the park, looked also unshorn and uncared for. Here had lived the ancient and noble family of the Pelhams. The last inhabitant, a strange eccentric character, had been dead several years, and since his time no one had lived there excepting the poor family who had the charge of the place. Herbert and Meggy were delighted to know that they might walk about here just where they liked; they climbed over the sunk fence and were in the garden; they ran on before every body else and peeped in, first at one window and then at another; they saw large empty rooms; nothing remained in them but the billiard table and the old portraits which seemed looking at them from their places on the walls.

The party knocked at the door to make the old man or woman who lived there hear, but nobody came; they knocked again and again, but still there was no answer. On the other side of the house was a room with low windows down to the ground: one of these was open, and through it they entered. They now were in a large and very low room, round which were ranged portraits which had been taken from the walls. Whilst they were looking at these they heard the door softly open, and in peeped a little girl of about Herbert's age. She looked astonished to find so large a party of unknown

people there, and was retreating hastily when she was called back. She came in, drawing after her a little timid-looking boy of perhaps four, who, having heard strange voices address his sister, seemed to cling to her hand in terror, too much frightened to run away, and almost too much frightened to come in. The little girl said that they lived with their parents and their grandmother in this house; their father was out at work all day long, and their mother was then gone to the town with their grandmother, who was bad of the rheumatism. Were they not afraid of being left thus alone, somebody asked them; alone in that desolate old house with all those old portraits of gentlefolks who had been dead for so many years? The little boy said nothing, but clung to his sister as if she were capable of defending him in any danger, real or imaginary.

"Oh no!" the little girl replied, "not a bit afraid! Bobby often was frightened," she said, "but then he was so young, and when the owls screeched and the jackdaws flustered in the chimneys, it set him quite in a tremble; but there was nothing to be afraid of. Bobby and she always played together," she said, and when the rooms were all light, and the sun shone, she showed him the pictures of the old gentlefolks, and made him look at those which were cheerful and had pleasant

faces, for she thought in time he would get used to them. And mostly, she said, when their mother was out their cousins came and played with them, and they were older than they, and that made it very pleasant.

"Had they always lived there?" Herbert's mamma inquired.

"Yes," the little girl replied; she had always lived there, and that made her so used to the place; but Bobby had lived with his grandmother ever since he was a year old; but that now, when she was so infirm and badly, she had come to live with them, and brought Bobby home again; and, as he had been used only to his grandmother's house, all these big, empty, and lonesome-looking rooms frightened him; but he would get used to them in time, she said, and think no more of them than she did.

Bobby drew close up to her, as she told all this, and looked up into her face with such admiring and loving eyes, as made quite a pretty picture.

Herbert also gazed on the little girl with admiration; she seemed to him a little heroine, and Meggy, softly stealing to the side of the timid little boy, wanted to take his hand; but he, not, perhaps, understanding her wish, withdrew it hastily, and clung closer than ever to his sister's side.

There was very little to be seen in the house, and the party was soon ready to set off again.

As they approached the wood of tall trees behind the house, the eyes of every one were suddenly attracted to the immense flight of rooks that were coming home to the trees, and then they saw that this wood was an immense rookery. Neither the children nor their parents had ever seen any thing like this flight of birds; they came, as it seemed, by thousands, quite a black stream of them; the top branches seemed full of them, others were fluttering about before they settled down, and others, and by far the greater number, seemed yet coming up, as far off along the sky as they could see.

This, then, must have been a very old settlement of rooks, or crows, as in the country they are often called, and, probably, as they formerly were always called, and hence the name of the place *Hurst*, in the old Saxon meaning *wood*. Probably, nay, most likely, this had been Crow-hurst, or in other words, Rookwood, at the very time when William the Conqueror took possession of this country. These rooks, then, were the direct descendants of those to which the old Saxon Edwys and Ethelreds, and Athelstans and Alfreds had listened — nay, who could say, but that Alfred the Great and his children might have walked where they were now walking, and listened to the voices of the home-returning rooks as they

came up, in a black company, from the marshes and meadows to the old hurst, where, going backward still farther on the stream of time, they very likely had lived in the times of the Druids.

From this they began to talk about the derivation of names of places: this was a new subject to the children, but one which Herbert, at least, perfectly understood. He knew that, in German, *horst* means a tall, old wood, where eagles and such-like birds build; this word, the same no doubt, originally, as our *hurst*, was introduced into England by the Saxons, when they came and settled here. Their papa told them that in all our English forests there was a place called Lindhurst, which originally meant the wood of lime-trees; and here, again, Herbert's German knowledge helped him, for he knew that a *lindenbaum* is a lime-tree. There are, also, his papa continued, the names of Ash, or Ashen-hurst, the ash-wood; Mid-hurst, the wood between two hills, or towns; Combe-hurst, the wood in a combe, or hollow; Oak-hurst, the oak-wood, and so on. Other names also there are, of Danish origin, which were, of course, introduced by the Danes, in their inroads and settlements in this country; for instance, such names of places as Kirkby, which means the town with the church, *kirke* meaning church, as in Scotch, and *by* being

Danish for town, as Whitby, the white town, from hvidt, white, and by, town, and many others.

From this subject they went on to talk of the Danes; what savage people they must have been, and how wild and dismal a country England no doubt was when they made their inroads on the coasts. Somebody spoke of Ragnar Lodbrok and his sons, and said that it was to Whitby or Hviteby, as the Danes called it in Yorkshire, that these four sons came when they wanted to prove that they were men of courage and daring.

Herbert had never heard of Ragnar Lodbrok before: he was quite excited about it, and in the evening when they were at home he begged his father to tell him all about him and his sons.

CHAP. XXXV.

AN OLD STORY WHICH THE CHILDREN HEAR.

We will now tell our young readers the story of Ragnar Lodbrok and his sons, which Herbert's and Meggy's papa told them.

"Ragnar Lodbrok had four sons by his second wife; the eldest son was called Iwar: he had gristle every where in his body instead of bone; he was, therefore, unable to walk, and was carried about in a litter; but for all that he was very tall and strong, and very wise and prudent. The second was called Björn or the Bear, and afterwards he gained the additional name of Ironsides, not, as you may suppose, because he wore armour, but because he went to battle with his body uncovered, so that people imagined some magic power rendered his body like iron, and preserved it from being wounded. The third was called Hvirtserk, and the fourth Rognwald. They grew up very strong and stout young men, and were very expert in all kind of games as well as in war.

The sons of Ragnar by his first wife had already distinguished themselves as great warriors, and people talked a great deal about their wonderful deeds; and these four younger sons thought that they would

no longer remain at home doing nothing, but would go out too, and get renown and glory for themselves, as their brothers had done. Their father approved of their wishes, and gave them ships of war; and they sailed up and down in various seas, visited foreign countries, and gained many victories and great wealth.

This being done, Iwar then proposed that they should undertake something still more difficult, so that their bravery might be more easily seen. He therefore suggested that they should attack Hviteby, or the white-town in Yorkshire, because many brave kings, their own father among the rest, had been there, and had been obliged to flee away on account of the great valour of the people, and of the witchcraft which they practised.

The brothers agreed, and so they all sailed to Whitby. They ordered their brother Rognwald, whom they thought too young for so great an enterprise, to remain with the ships, and they three went up to the castle where old stories related that two magical cows were kept which had such great power that nobody could resist them, nor even leave off listening when once they began to bellow.

The people in the castle set themselves in array to oppose the brothers, and let loose the terrible cows against them. The cows ran forward and began to bellow, which so frightened the followers of

the three brothers that they all ran away. When Iwar, who, being unable to walk, was carried upon a shield, saw this, he took his bow and shot at the cows and killed them, on which the battle immediately turned in their favour.

While this was going on, young Rognwald, who remained in the ships, said to the men who were with him, "My brothers and their people are well off to have such fun and pastime. They have left us here that they may have all the glory to themselves. Let us go up and do something on our own account!"

They did so, and young Rognwald fought so furiously that he soon fell. His brothers were angry to see that he was gone contrary to their orders; but when they saw that he was dead they fell more furiously than ever on the towns-people, took all their goods and property, burned the castle, and went home again.

"Well, I think it was very shocking," said Meggy, "and very wrong, for the people of Whitby had done them no harm."

Herbert told Meggy to be quiet, and asked his papa to go on about these wild, old Danes.

"The three sons of Ragnar," continued he, "went wandering about on their expeditions so far that their father, at one time, did not know what had become of them. They took it into their heads

that they would go on and on so far till, at last, they would even get to Rome, and that nothing should content them less than conquering that famous city. They were not very learned in geography, you may think, for they did not know how far off Rome was, so one day they met with an old grey-headed beggar, and asked him how far it was to Rome. He showed them two pair of old iron sandals, and said he had worn them out in coming from Rome. Upon hearing this they thought that if Rome was such a very long way off, it was too far even for them to go, and therefore they must content themselves with countries nearer home.

Their father, however, as I said, did not know where they were; but hearing every where that they had done very famous deeds, and were very much thought of by every body, he began to think that he too should like to undertake some great exploit like them. In his youth he had conquered a king of England, and had made him pay tribute for many years. His son, however, refused to pay it, and now Ragnar thought that he would set off and make him. He collected his ships and his men, and was ready for the expedition. His wife Aslög, the mother of those three famous sons of his, and who was a very wise woman, thought it would be a deal better if he would stay at home, but she could not persuade him, so she made him a shirt of greyish-

coloured silk which was not sewn, but wove in a loom: she gave him this, and told him that it was a magical shirt; that steel would have no effect upon him while he wore it, because it was blest by the gods.

A violent tempest met him on the coast of England: his ships were wrecked, and he and his men escaped only with their arms and their lives. That was a bad beginning. The English king, whose name was Ethelred, and who had assembled all his best soldiers, came up to meet him. Ragnar put on his silken shirt and his helmet, and in this state he fought. All his men were killed around him, and at last he stood enclosed in a wall of shields and was taken prisoner. The king thought that it was Ragnar, and asked his name but Ragnar gave no answer. It will be all the worse for him, said Ethelred, if he will not speak.

Ethelred, who had heard the fame of Ragnar's sons, was afraid that if he killed their father they would take some terrible revenge, so he was all the more anxious to know really who his captive was. Ragnar would not tell his name, and Ethelred then ordered them to cast him into a pit of serpents, with orders that the moment he confessed himself to be Ragnar, he should be taken out. But the serpents would not touch him because of the enchanted shirt. Then they took off his shirt, and the serpents attacked him on all sides. He then said,

"How the young pigs would grunt if they knew of the old boar's death and how he suffers!" meaning his sons. Nobody understood what he meant, and so he died, singing a very famous death-song, which has been many times translated into English.

"I think they were very stupid not to know that it was Ragnar," exclaimed Meggy.

"And what did the young pigs say when they heard of the old boar's death?" asked Herbert.

"When Ethelred," continued the children's papa," heard how his prisoner had died, and of the words which he had spoken, he knew quite certainly that this was Ragnar, and he was very much afraid of his sons. He sent, therefore, ambassadors to announce to them the death of their father, with strict orders to notice how they behaved when they heard of it.

When the ambassadors arrived, Hvirtserk and his half-brother Sigurd were sitting together playing at drafts; Björn stood in the middle of the room, fixing a handle into his lance, and Iwar was reclining on a couch. The ambassadors said that they were sent by king Ethelred to inform them of their father's death. When Sigurd and Hvirtserk heard that their father was dead, they let fall the draft-board; but Iwar begged the ambassadors to relate all the particulars. They did so, and when they came to the place where Ragnar said, "How the young pigs

would grunt," Björn grasped the handle of his lance so hard, that he left the marks of his fingers in it, and then hacked it so violently that it broke in pieces. Hvirtserk pressed the draft-man which he held in his hand with such force, that the blood sprung from his finger-ends. Sigurd sat paring his nails with a knife, and he listened with such attention to what was said, that he cut his finger to the bone without being aware of it. Iwar asked carefully about every particular, and his colour sometimes became blue, sometimes pale, and sometimes red. Hvirtserk wanted to kill the messengers, but Iwar said, Let them go home in peace; so they returned to Ethelred and told him all, and Ethelred said he had most to fear from Iwar.

The three brothers, Hvirtserk, Björn, and Sigurd, determined to set out directly to be revenged on Ethelred. Iwar counselled them not. However, they were not to be turned from their purpose; they *would* go with all their ships and fighting men, and Iwar, on whose wisdom every body placed great dependence, went with them, although he said he would take no part in the war. Ethelred met them on the coast and defeated them. Iwar then said, that he was willing to receive an atonement for his father's death, at which, his brothers being much offended, sailed away with their ships. Ethelred could hardly believe Iwar's words; he

thought that certainly some great treachery was designed by him. Iwar, however, swore that he would never bear arms against him, and the king was satisfied.

Iwar then demanded as an atonement for the death of his father as much land as he could enclose with an ox's hide, which Ethelred, thinking a small request, readily granted. Iwar took a very large hide, had it steeped in water, and stretched it to the utmost: he then had it cut into very narrow strips, and these he bound together into a very long band, with which he encircled a very large space on a height and there he built a castle, which is the old castle of Lincoln. Here he lived, and being very famous for his great wisdom and generosity, many people soon came to live near him. He then sent over to his brothers for his share of his father's personal possessions, which they sent to him, and thus he had much valuable treasure. In process of time, his true designs came out: he sent a message to his brothers bidding them to collect all their forces and come against the English king. When the news of this came to Ethelred, he sent to Iwar and charged him with the breach of his oath. Iwar said that he had kept, and would keep, his oath to the king: he would not bear arms against him, neither would he against his brothers. He assisted his brothers, however, by his prudent counsel and

his knowledge of English affairs. The brothers made an attack, dispersed Ethelred's troops, and took him prisoner.

The Danish historians say that Iwar caused Ethelred to be cruelly put to death in revenge for the sufferings of his father; however that may be, Iwar continued to live in England, where he was rich and powerful.

This is the account which Herbert's and Meggy's papa gave them of some of the wild inroads of the Danes on the coasts of England; and when, a short time afterwards, they read in Mrs. Markham's History of England of the trouble and distress which their favourite Alfred the Great endured from his Danish foes, they seemed to understand the subject all the better for their papa's narrative of Ragnar Lodbrok and his sons.

CHAP. XXXVI.

GETTING INTO WINTER, AND ABOUT A STRANGE VISITOR WHO CAME TO SEE THE CHILDREN.

THE pleasant month at Hastings was over. They bade farewell to the sea and the shore, and the submarine forest for which they had looked in vain; they paid their last visit to the Castle and the East Cliff, and to the old sea-gods with their green wigs; and, furnished with a plentiful supply of roots of thrift and sea-poppy, and fern, and harts-tongue for the rockery at home, and with, what they thought, a most valuable collection of pebbles, shells, and sea-weed, they returned to London. They were very sorry to leave Hastings; they thought that the month they were there was the pleasantest time they ever had spent any where; they were sure they should never forget it, and their mamma believed that they never would.

Herbert and Meggy had again parted: he was at school and she was at home; but the parting, this time, was without tears, for they found that their occasional meetings were so full of pleasure that really they had nothing more to desire. In a few weeks Christmas would be here, and then there

would be the long holidays, when they should be together for six weeks.

It looked a great deal more like winter, and the approach towards Christmas when they got home than it did at Hastings; there it was very warm; so warm indeed that no fire was needed except in an evening; they saw the sun rise in a morning, and set at night; it was quite different at home: here it felt cold, and was often very foggy, and the sun seemed hardly to shine all day; nobody could do without fire, and people were wearing their winter clothing. It really was the beginning of winter in London, and at Hastings it had often seemed like June—well, the only comfort was that Christmas was coming.

A short time after their return, Alfred informed Herbert and Meggy that Pelz-Nickel was coming to pay them a visit. The children remembered Pelz-Nickel when they were in Germany, perfectly well; but as he was coming to visit them in England, they all talked over his visit, and in fact, one of their Christmases in Germany.

When they were there they, the little children, had been very much frightened at Pelz-Nickel. Even Alfred then had hardly known what to think of him. He came about a fortnight before Christmas, and a very great deal was said about him before he came. He went to everybody's house

whether they were rich or poor, and desired to see all the children. The children, who were always put into a great state of agitation by his visit, came before him: he told them that he was the famous Pelz-Nickel, the forerunner of Christkindchen, the Christ-child or, which is perhaps a better name, the little angel of Christmas; and that he was come to know whether they were good and worthy to receive such presents as the kind and beautiful little Christmas angel was going to bring them.

Pelz-Nickel had come to Herbert's and Meggy's home in Germany. His visit was talked of for a long time, and at last one morning they heard that he was really coming that very evening. Mary and Alfred talked over with the little children all the particulars of his visit.

Before it grew dusk their faces and hands were well washed, and their hair smoothly combed, and they were made very neat and nice to receive him; they sat in the *saal*, or drawing-room, with their parents, and brother and sister, and Ellen, all waiting for his arrival. At last one of the German maids ran upstairs out of the kitchen, looking quite excited, and said he really was coming; he was just then at the door! A loud, very, very loud ringing at the great entrance-door was then heard; heavy footsteps slowly ascended the broad stone staircase, and strange sounds were heard as of a

gruff voice, and the rattling and dragging of a chain, and then the drawing-room door burst open, and in walked Pelz-Nickel. He was, as his name expressed, dressed in furs, his name meaning furry-Nicholas. He had a high fur cap on, fur boots, and a fur cloak, which was bound round him by a chain, the end of which dragged on the ground; on one side hung a huge bag, and in one hand he held a ponderous rod, as big as a besom, only not so thick. He said that he was the celebrated Pelz-Nickel, come all the way out of Russia, and now made his annual visit to that house to inquire the characters of the children, that he might report them to the little Christmas angel. He asked about their learning; demanded to see their writing books and hear them read; he said he had heard such and such things of them — any little faults which of course had been told to him beforehand — and of these they must cure themselves, or else — and here he shook his tremendous rod over them — meaning to say, else they would be punished in some dreadful way or other; but, continued he, other things also had he heard of them which had given him great pleasure, and these were, that they tried, as much as they knew how, to do right, that they were industrious and loving to each other, and obedient to their parents; and therefore he would present them with a token of his good will

and kindness; and with that he put his hand into his great big bag, and out came such a torrent of apples and gingerbread nuts and raisins, and all kind of things as never was seen. What a rejoicing there was, and what a scrambling to pick all up, and yet all the time such a secret dread lest they should go within reach of his great rod, which he kept flourishing about all the time as if he meant to use it!

After all this scrambling and bustling had somewhat subsided, Pelz-Nickel had something further to say, and that was, that the little Christmas angel would assuredly pay them a visit on Christmas-eve, and would bring them a many very beautiful things. Having said this, Pelz-Nickel smiled, made his bow, and departed. He was not, after all, anything to be afraid of; he was a right good fellow, and the children only wished that he would come once a week instead of once a year.

As Pelz-Nickel had said the little Christmas angel would come, wonderful were the preparations that were made to receive him. Nobody was permitted to go into the drawing-room all the day before Christmas-eve; it was shut up, and the children were sure that something out of the common way was going on in it. Every body also looked busy and mysterious; and though they had been ordered to keep in the nursery with Ellen all the

day, yet they were for ever popping out and running into every body's way, and every body was carrying a something or other, and was sure to say, "Do go out of my way, children! what *are* you children doing here!" and then off they scampered only to meet a somebody else who was carrying another mysterious something. Well, it was odd!

Herbert threw himself down on his little old-fashioned wooden German stool, and clasped both his knees with his hands, lifted up both his feet from the ground, and laughed with all his might. He was sure, that something funny was going to happen; and little Meggy, who was very little then, sate down on her little wooden stool beside him, and did just the same.

At last afternoon came, and then what a good washing they had, and how smooth their hair was made, and their best things were put on; and then it began to get dusk, and as soon as it was quite dark the little Christmas angel would come! And then — and then — oh, nobody knew what would happen then! The children did not, that was quite certain, for they had never been in Germany before, nor had read German books; all they knew was that every body had been talking ever since that funny old Pelz-Nickel came about the little Christmas angel's coming, and so there must be something very extraordinary about it.

At length it grew dark, and then some German friends, who were come to spend the day with them, said that the little Christmas angel had come into the house, nay, even into the drawing-room, and that in a few minutes the drawing-room door would open, and then — what would they not see! The children stood hand in hand, almost afraid to breathe; their eyes were twice their usual size, they expected to have so very much to behold.

And after all were they satisfied with what they saw? Nobody need have asked that question, who had seen their looks, and heard their shout of amazement, when the drawing-room door really opened. The whole room looked to them like a fairy palace; such a blaze of light was there, revealing such wonderful things! There was a tree, just like a tree come down from heaven; it was covered as if with flowers of softly burning light; birds of sugar, and of the loveliest colours of the rainbow, sate in the branches; and all the branches were laden with the most wonderful and varied fruits: there were golden apples and pears, and nuts; bunches of raisins, and almonds, and walnuts, and cakes, shaped like hearts, and rings, and diamonds, and beautiful bouquets of flowers, made of sugar! Oh, there was no telling all that wonderful tree bore! And under the tree there was a garden full of flowers, and velvet-like moss, and in the garden there was a

stag with gilded horns, and a shepherd with his sheep. It was just like something in an old-fashioned Christmas carol, and every body, as well as the children, were full of delight at the sight of it.

But the tree was not the only wonderful thing there; there was the little Christmas angel, all in white, with white wings, like a real angel, and a crown of silver on his head, and a little silver bell in his hand; and he rang his little bell, and then, first to one and then to another, he gave beautiful presents.

The children remembered all this — they would never forget it; they remembered the doll and the horse, and the little dishes and plates, and chairs, and tables, which he had given them, and the great picture-books, which they still had, and the little fable-books, and the scarlet coats trimmed with fur, that he brought. Was he not a wonderful Christmas angel?

That Christmas-eve, as we have said, they remembered, although they had forgotten many of the little particulars which their parents and brother and sister remembered perfectly well. And now this winter, of which we are writing, when they were come home from Hastings, Alfred informed them that their old German friend, Pelz-Nickel, who, of late years, partly in consequence of so many German families living in England, had been in the

habit of coming to this country, intended to pay them a visit.

After this time Alfred was always talking about Pelz-Nickel: now he would whisper with Mary, and then begin laughing so merrily; and what was very odd, was, that though he never would explain to the little ones exactly what it was that made him laugh, still it always came out that it was something about Pelz-Nickel; he had heard something about his intentions, or where he was, and at last of all, he had even seen him. Alfred also, about this time, which was the commencement of Herbert's holidays, was very much given to going into the nursery, and ordering Herbert and Meggy out, if they were there, on pretence that he had something very important to say to Ellen; or Ellen *had* some sewing to do for him, or he wanted to do some himself, and he must have plenty of room, and a great big needle, and strong thread, and he must have nobody bothering him, and so Herbert and Meggy must march off somewhere, for he hated having little children poking their heads and hands in his way. Meggy and Herbert thought it *very* disagreeable of him, but there never was any use in opposing Alfred, for he always would have his way.

When the little children asked Alfred whether this English Pelz-Nickel, that was coming to see

them, was at all like the one they had seen in Germany, Alfred said, not exactly like him, for that he was old Pelz-Nickel's youngest brother, and therefore could not afford to be as well-dressed; for instance the coat in which he would come, and it was his best coat, and one which he had made for the occasion, was made of coarse hempen cloth, and was only lined with fur; his hair, he said, which was flax-coloured, from living in snowy countries, like the hares and ermines of the north, was tied behind in a long pig-tail; he had a red, frost-bitten sort of face, and he spoke in a queer squeaking kind of voice, and altogether was not half as grave and venerable as his elder brother; but then he had quite as large a rod, and Alfred was not sure, whether his bag was not larger, at all events he had plenty of good things in it, and therefore would do quite as well for them.

The children were in a state of the highest excitement and delight. The very day after Alfred had described him, a letter written in queer, sharp-pointed, German characters came to the family: it was to make known that on the very evening on which that letter was received, Pelz-Nickel, junior, would pay them a visit. How the little children rejoiced to hear this! Alfred looked grave, shook his head, and said that he meant to be out of the way when young Pelz-Nickel came. The children thought

that was very cowardly; they said they were not the least in the world afraid of him, and they were sure Pelz-Nickel would give him something. But he was not to be persuaded; as soon as it began to grow dusk, he took up his hat and walked off.

The children and their mamma sat by the fire; it was almost dark out of doors; they ran to the library to beg that their papa would come in and see Pelz-Nickel; and their papa, like a good papa as he was, allowed himself to be dragged in, even from a new book which he was reading. Mary came in, the children had spent a whole quarter of an hour in trying to find her — people *did* hide themselves so unaccountably, they said!

However, Mary was now there, and so were their papa and mamma, and the candles were brought in; and then Mary said, she quite believed that Pelz-Nickel was not far off. Scarcely had she said these words when a loud ringing at the bell announced his arrival; his steps were heard in the hall, his chain rattled, and the queer squeaking voice of which Alfred had spoken, was heard — and in he came! He spoke broken English at first, and then he began talking in German; he ordered Meggy first of all to come, and then Herbert, and questioned them of many things, and told them of all their little faults — there was not one but he knew it — he even knew about Herbert swinging the doll

round by its legs, and scattering the saw-dust out of its body, and saying that dolls were silly things. He knew about Meggy being so idle over the kettle-holder she was making, and preferring rather to knit the cat a stocking than to read her lessons! He was a wonderfully well-informed Pelz-Nickel! He shook his rod about desperately, and then he shook his bag, and the children heard the nuts rattling in it — but just as they thought he was going to put his hand in and bring something out, he suddenly turned round and demanded where was that youth — that elder son — that Alfred?

Herbert burst into a fit of laughter, Meggy looked frightened, and wondered what Herbert could mean by laughing in that way. Herbert knew that this Pelz-Nickel junior was Alfred himself, and therefore he laughed. He laughed again, and afraid that Pelz-Nickel might not hear him, he plucked at his coarse coat, and told him that Alfred had gone away because he was coming.

"Ho! oh!" said Pelz-Nickel, "I'll be after him when I've done with you!" and he put his hand in his bag, and said that they should see what he had brought for good children; and out came lots of good things; such rosy-cheeked apples, though it was Christmas, and such nuts, and raisins, and gingerbread. He said they must take care and not give Alfred any, for he had got something for him

too if he could only catch him; and with that he began to make movements with his terrible rod as if it were *that* that he meant. And with this he disappeared.

In a little while Alfred came in. He was as full of inquiries as the children were of news. Herbert, who entered into the whole joke completely, began to tell Alfred how Pelz-Nickel was dressed, and what a queer figure he looked with his hair tied into a long tail. And such a face! He had a black beard that hung to his breast, and a coat all lined with sheep-skin like rugs, and hairy gloves, just as if they had been made of poor old widow Brown's skin, — Alfred's favourite rabbit, the skin of which he had tanned when she died — and such big legs and shoes, quite as rough and odd-looking as grandmamma's buffalo-slippers, and a fur cap standing up half a yard, just like mamma's muff — oh! if Alfred had but seen him! and then his voice! Herbert laughed, and jumped about for joy.

Later in the evening, as the children were cracking their nuts and eating some of their apples, what should they see but Alfred take just such an apple as one of theirs out of his pocket, and begin to eat it without ever thinking that they would notice it. Herbert was sure from this that he was right in his conjectures; he whispered his opinion to Meggy. *Alfred was Pelz-Nickel.* Meggy did not so readily

comprehend all this. Alfred went out of the house, she argued; she had seen him herself. "He only pretended to go," said Herbert; "he went to dress himself, upstairs or somewhere, and Mary helped him. She came in, and then Pelz-Nickel came; and how could Alfred be in the room, if he were Pelz-Nickel? no, certainly! Did not she see? Pelz-Nickel went out, and then Alfred came in; and now Alfred had an apple out of his own bag. That was it! that was it! He saw it all as plainly as could be." He clasped his knees again, as he often did when he was much delighted, and lifted up his feet and rocked backwards and forwards. "It might be so," Meggy said; "but she was not sure at all." Herbert said "he was quite sure about it, but that he choose to believe in Pelz-Nickel, and he hoped he would come and see them again."

CHAP. XXXVII.

THE STRANGE VISITOR AGAIN MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

THE visit of Pelz-Nickel, of course, was only preparatory to that of the little Christmas angel.

In observance of the German custom, the children on Christmas-eve were well washed and dressed in their best clothes, and they sat with their father and mother by the library fire, talking about all the hundreds and thousands of happy families in England, but more especially in Germany, who were going to enjoy that evening as delightfully as they had done; they all wished that there was nobody too poor in England and Scotland and Ireland to make a festival, and to receive a visit from the little Christmas angel. While they were thus saying, the little Christmas angel was heard to ring his silvery bell in their own house, and Mary summoned them all into the dining room, where the visitor was to be received. The room was light and cheerful, with plenty of red-berried ivy and misletoe, but there was no Christmas tree. Presently, however, a sound was heard outside—no doubt it was the beautiful white-winged Christmas angel; the door opened, and then im-

mediately entered nobody at all, but the comical black-bearded squeaking-voiced Pelz-Nickel.

There was some strange mistake Mary said, and the little Christmas angel must have lost his way, for here was old Pelz-Nickel; she wanted to keep him out of the house she said, but he *would* come in, and he was so strong it was no use opposing him. On this Pelz-Nickel began bowing and scraping and making endless apologies in English and German; he knew it would all be badly managed, he said, for the English did not understand a regular German Christmas. The English, he said, were a very left-handed people—he begged pardon for saying so—and that made him just look in as he was on his way back to Novogorod, for he had taken a great liking to the little children. And so, as he was here, and with permission of all the good company assembled, he would take upon himself to be the little Christmas angel, which would be very wrong, he knew, according to German usage, but it would do very well for England.

Herbert whispered to Mary that he did not like that, for England was quite as good as Germany. Mary squeezed his hand to make him quiet, for Pelz-Nickel, in a voice ten times more squeaking than ever, said he would now distribute the gifts. Every body thought that all these gifts were to come out of his bag, but instead of that he drew a

great marketing basket, to every body's surprise, from under the table. The basket was covered with a cloth, and on this being removed it was seen to be full of beautiful things. There was a wooden box for Meggy and Herbert, which papa had given them, full of carpenter's tools — now what a deal of work they could do in their house. It was just what they wanted. Then came a book for them. The Good-natured Bear. The author had sent it to them; but who was the author? Nobody knew; every body said it must be Pelz-Nickel himself. Then came something for somebody else, and then something for Alfred. Alfred was called, but no Alfred came.

"Put it in your bag, Pelz-Nickel!" shouted Herbert. Pelz-Nickel said, it was a good idea, and that he would keep it too. Herbert danced about for joy, and everything that was for Alfred went into Pelz-Nickel's bag.

Presently there came a fresh set of chairs and tables for Herbert's and Meggy's house, and then such a flock of poultry, hens and cocks and guinea-fowls, all made with real feathers of the real birds, and they could stand and look just like life. And then there were more books. Mrs. Harriet Myrtle, her own dear self, had sent Meggy her last new book. And was not it a beautiful book! And there were fairy tales and histories of England,

and nobody knew what. And then there were purses and slippers, and beautiful pocket handkerchiefs for other people, and drawings and books — there seemed as if there would be no end to the treasures out of Pelz-Nickel's basket.

Pelz-Nickel made a deal of fun; there never was a merrier Christmas-eve even in Germany than that. When he came towards the bottom of the basket, he said that the remainder of the things were meant for the servants, and therefore he begged that Herbert and Meggy might show him the way into the kitchen, because, as a stranger, he could not be supposed to know the house.

The children were delighted. Meggy had lost all fear of him, and down stairs they went with a deal of noise and laughter, Pelz-Nickel even carrying her on his back.

After every body in parlour and kitchen had received their gifts Pelz-Nickel begged to take his leave. He made a dozen bows, said that he should tell all the good people in Novogorod, when he got there, what excellent, dearly beloved children were Herbert and Meggy; and so he went out.

They all seated themselves with their beautiful presents round the fire; presently in rushed Alfred with his arm full of things. He seemed out of breath, and looked quite hot; he said he had met with that fellow Pelz-Nickel, and found that he

was carrying off his presents in his bag. He said he had a terrible piece of work with him, but he had managed he believed to get all his things at last. He said that Pelz-Nickel was now quite gone; he was on his way to Novogorod, and that he would not return again to England for twelve months at least.

Such was the visit which Alfred's acquaintance, Pelz-Nickel, made to Herbert and Meggy that Christmas.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

MID-WINTER. THE CHILDREN SHALL SEE A PANTOMIME.

NEW Year's Day was come, and in eight days from this time Herbert would be eight years old.

Herbert and Meggy had a great desire to see a pantomime: they had heard their parents, and Mary and Alfred talk of the pleasure of going to a play; of the beautiful theatre lighted up, and the fine actors. They had some young friends, about their own age who had been to a pantomime; it had been described to them; they had sat and listened with breathless attention; they never had imagined till then how wonderful and charming it must be. They talked about it to each other; they wished they might see a pantomime; one of those funny plays which are got up on purpose for little children's amusement at Christmas time. Their surprise and pleasure then may be imagined when one morning at breakfast their papa said, "I hear that Herbert's birthday is just at hand!" Their papa never remembered birthdays, and somebody had always to remind him of them. "I hear, therefore," said he, "that Herbert's birthday

is just at hand. Of course he expects something on his birthday — all little boys do!"

Herbert smiled and blushed; he smiled because he knew that his papa was going to propose something pleasant, and he blushed — he did not know why. Meggy smiled too, and took hold of his hand — it was her way whenever Herbert was either in joy or trouble, the spirit of sympathy made her do it.

"Of course Herbert expects something on his birthday," repeated his papa; "what must it be?" The children looked at one another, and then at their mamma, and then at Mary, and then at their papa, but they said nothing.

"I have been thinking," said their papa, "that if *you* went to a pantomime, Herbert, Meggy must go too!"

"A pantomime!" exclaimed both children at once, "do let it be the pantomime, papa!"

"Yes," continued their papa, "we should be obliged to take Meggy with us. Don't you think so, Herbert, and that your mamma and I, and you and Meggy would make a charming party for a box at the theatre?"

Every body was of the same opinion.

"There are pantomimes performing at several of the theatres," said their papa; "we must now take the matter into serious consideration, for we cannot afford to go, such a large party, twice to the panto-

mime, so now you must choose wisely, that we may see the very best."

Alfred and Mary undertook to consult all the newspapers on this subject, and to ask all their friends who knew anything of the matter, and report accordingly. Mary and Alfred reported that Gulliver, at Drury Lane Theatre, was the most amusing pantomime in the world. Nothing more could be desired, and it was all settled that very same evening, that Herbert's birthday pleasure was to be, his and Meggy's going to see Gulliver.

"Oh, how good we will be, and how quiet! and we will not disturb any body all the day," said Herbert to Meggy, on the morning of his birthday; "for is it not kind of papa and mamma to take us to the pantomime? and the kinder people are, the more one wishes to do all that they would like. Is it not so, Hexey, dear?"

Meggy said yes, it was so; and most people, beside Meggy, knew that to be the case.

The only regret to the children at the commencement of this day was, that plays began in the evening instead of the morning.

The evening, however, came, after a happy day, which passed much quicker than either of them expected. The evening came, and the carriage, which was to take them to the theatre, came also; and away they went.

CHAP. XXXIX.

THE CHILDREN AT THE PANTOMIME.

When they came into Drury-Lane, people offered them bills for the theatre; they poked them in at the carriage window, and their papa bought one. The children's hearts beat; even this little circumstance had something exciting in it; people knew that they were going to the theatre! There was a throng of carriages at the door, and they had to wait some time before they could get in.

But now they have entered; other little children like themselves were there, with smoothly combed hair, thin shoes, and dressed in their best. They went up broad stone-stairs, with a crowd of people; entered a sort of narrow circular passage, and then a man opened for them a closet-like door, and what a scene presented itself! To them it was the most brilliant and enchanting scene in the world; the drop-scene; the lamps; the chandelier; the painting; the crimson and the gold; the form of the theatre; the people assembled in pit and boxes; the little girls in white frocks and pink sashes, and the little boys in their dark, handsome dresses, sitting, just as they themselves were doing, in front

rows, looking at every thing around them with wondering eyes and hearts—was quite a glorious and thrilling sight! More people, and more people came in; other little girls in white frocks and pink and blue sashes, and took their seats beside of other little boys,—and all looked happy and full of expectation. There was a low hum of conversation, and the clear voices of children heard around them.

Was it not charming? and had they any idea that coming to a theatre was half as pleasant as this!

And now the orchestra began to play; the right arms of the musicians worked away on violins and violoncellos; bassoons and flutes, and horns were blown; and every body sat listening to the overture. All of a sudden the foot-lamps, on the stage, are filled with stronger light; the overture is ended; a little bell rings; the curtain draws up, and the play begins.

Now, what did Herbert and Meggy think! They thought of nothing but the unexpected scene before them.

The pantomime came last this night, and the performances began with the first act of the "Daughter of St. Mark's."

To the children, every thing which they saw for the first moment, was a reality. There seemed

such immense space to them, but it was no less a reality. They saw the magnificent and beautiful colonnade of a palace, and palace gardens, in which were marble terraces and fountains, and statues. A beautiful young lady in white satin came forward, as if walking from the palace-gardens, and sang like a nightingale; and then a gentleman, in a grand Venetian dress, came out of the palace, and he sang too; and the lady's father, he came and sang; and so did a handsome gentleman, who seemed to be sent by the French king, to oppose the young lady's marriage with the first gentleman, and who seemed very fierce and angry, and all that he said he sang also. Both the children were fond of music and singing; and the music and the singing to which they listened delighted and astonished them, for it was quite unlike any thing they had heard before. They had been accustomed to see pictures also, and to them this was like a grand, living picture. Of course they did not understand half they saw or heard, but they understood enough to think it the very finest thing they had ever seen.

After this came a wonderful leaping and jumping gentleman and his two little sons, who leaped and jumped and bounded about more wonderfully even than he did. The children's hearts warmed towards these young performers, so light, so graceful, so exquisite and buoyant in all their move-

ments. Meggy, at first, shut her eyes in terror, lest they should fall, or be hurt in any way; Herbert, from the very first, clapped his hands, and applauded with all his might: it was quite a relief to him to be able vehemently to express his wonder and admiration. It was with great pleasure, after the performance, that they saw beautiful bouquets of flowers thrown from all sides to these little children. Meggy thought it must make them so happy to know how pleased every body was with them, and she wondered whether they had a mother and sister at home, to whom they could go and tell all their triumph.

"I wish we came to the play every night," said Herbert, sitting down on his seat, in the interval before the next piece began, "would it not be nice, Hexey?"

In the next piece there was a deal of fun, and a ballet, which was charming. What a deal there was to see even before the pantomime of "Gulliver" began.

At length all was done, excepting "Gulliver;" and now the curtain drew up. The first scene was Guildhall, after a Lord Mayor's feast, and Gog and Magog, those very giants which Herbert had seen in the summer, and about which he had had so much to tell; and Gog and Magog, at the hour of twelve, came down from their pedestals, just as the funny gentleman had told them; and then, all of a

sudden, the beautiful fairy queen made her appearance — the fairy queen which Meggy liked so much! This really *was* the best of all. Another *best of all*, however, came when Gulliver found himself in the island of Lilliput, among all its swarms of little people. Not a word did either Meggy or Herbert say when they saw this. First of all, there was the little wood-cutter, and his tidy little wife, who first discovered the giant Gulliver lying asleep on the shore. That dear little wood-cutter and his wife might have been Meggy and Herbert themselves, they were exactly such a couple. It was just like them playing, and she had brought the baby for him to look at — her doll, — just as she herself might have done. Then how charming was the terror of this little man and his little wife! they roused the whole country round, and in came, flocking, little town-folks, and little country-folks, in all sorts of old-fashioned and new-fashioned dresses, and doctors in wigs and spectacles, and little old women and little old men hobbling along, afraid of being too late; and little policemen, in little blue uniforms, who *were* too late; and it was the merriest thing in the world to see the little legs, how they trotted up and down, and how the little hands and arms, and heads, were in motion, and to hear the little voices send forth such a little hubbub of surprise and wonder.

Not a single word, however, had Meggy or Herbert to say; they were dumb with astonishment and delightful sympathy. Herbert's eyes were full of tears: he never had felt so much excited in all his life before.

The scene changed. The king and queen of Lilliput came forth with all their state, and attended by their court and all their guards. Little feet moved on again, and this time, with a stately and measured tread, little heads were held aloft, in all the dignity of powder and plumes, and in front of the lovely little palace of Lilliput, the king and queen seated themselves on their little thrones.

The children might well admire it; even their mamma said that it was beautiful.

Long before the pantomime had reached the second act, however, Herbert had recovered himself so as to give the most lively demonstrations of his pleasure; he laughed and clapped, and entered into all the fun of Gulliver, eating up all the king and queen's dinner, and carrying off dozens of people at once, and the king and queen themselves tucked under his arm, when the great fire broke out in the palace.

The children's amazement was unbounded when Gulliver and his old wife transformed themselves all at once into clown and pantaloon. And then what fun and drollery followed!

There was, however, a considerable difference of opinion between Meggy and Herbert on this part of the performance. Meggy was greatly dissatisfied with the conduct of clown and pantaloon; she thought it in so many cases unprincipled and dishonest. They were funny fellows, she said, very funny, but she did not like them; they told all kind of falsehoods, and it made her feel uncomfortable; she was sorry, she said, that they should do so. Herbert argued that it was all fun and nonsense, and make-believe, and that nobody really had pockets big enough to carry off sheets and blankets, and nobody could, in reality, make a ladder up which a man was mounting run down into the ground, or make a grocer's shop at the moment a man was going to enter it change into a wine merchant's, and if they did run away with other people's things it was all for fun; and as to the ugly faces they made, they were all fun too, and Meggy should not be so particular.

He was sure, he said, that it was very droll, and he wished he could see it every night. Meggy maintained her opinion; she liked everything in the play, excepting this last part of it, and she was sorry that it was the last, because she could not help thinking of it, and it made her uncomfortable; she was very much afraid that she should dream of their ugly faces.

CHAP. XL.

THE EIGHTH OF JANUARY. THE YEAR IS ENDED, AND THE CHILDREN ARE HAPPY.

It was long past midnight when the children reached home, and even that was a source of interest and pleasure. They never in all their lives had been up so late before. The quiet empty midnight streets of London were a new idea to them; they had hitherto only seen them full of life and bustle. Their papa told them of Wordsworth's beautiful sonnet, in which he describes all so hushed in repose, that "the very houses seemed asleep." They both could very well understand the idea; the very houses seemed asleep now; they would never forget the idea and the impression.

When they reached home all was so still also; they thought how startled the poor little mice, who had come out for the night, would be at their thus coming home when they had fancied them all in bed and asleep.

They had a pleasant little supper in the warm dining-room, and they talked over again all the many things that they had seen that night. Meggy

had somewhat lost the last unpleasant impression; they remembered nothing but what was agreeable.

They kissed their father and mother with loving and grateful hearts; they thought of the delight of telling all to Alfred and Mary next morning; and then they went to bed as silently as little mice themselves, that they might disturb nobody in the house.

Thus ended twelve months of happy childhood. Much had been learned in that time, and much had been enjoyed. They had made abundant pleasures for themselves, and they had contributed, in their small way, to the pleasures of others. They were happy; and one purpose of our lives here is happiness, as well as trial; we are intended for happiness by our great heavenly Father. Would that all children might be as happy as their age and nature is capable of! for a happy childhood and the early cultivation of the affections are a good foundation for a useful manhood.

THE END.

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